

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE 'NEW AGE' : WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GLASTONBURY, SOMERSET

Ruth E. C. Prince

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
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with special reference to
Glastonbury, Somerset.'**

by Ruth E. C. Prince

**Thesis submitted for the degree of M.Phil (mode A) to the
University of St. Andrews.**

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Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological study of the 'New Age' movement, in the area of Glastonbury, Somerset, England. It is based upon one year's participant observation in Glastonbury from October 1989 to November 1990. The thesis looks at the philosophy of living which these people, referred to as 'New Agers', have adopted, and which they believe to present an alternative to the values of mainstream Western society. I examine how they combine their ideas with the pressures of living as a sub-culture within British society.

I begin this thesis by posing the question, 'what is the New Age?'. In doing so I raise questions about the classification of groups, notions of community, and the boundary of the group. Introducing my ethnographic example of the New Age movement in Glastonbury, I attempt to provide a backdrop in the context of locality. I then proceed to present the ethnography under the themes of holism and individualism. The analytical commentary that follows the ethnography discusses individualism and holism with reference to Louis Dumont's work. In contrast to Dumont I present the two ideas as a complement rather than mutually exclusive. I conclude by looking at the New Age movement within the wider historical context of Utopian groups.

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Introduction

"The last thing one settles in writing a book,' Pascal observes, 'is what one should put in first.' So, having written, collected and arranged these strange tales, having selected a title and two epigraphs, I must now examine what I have done - and why."

Oliver Sacks¹

It is sometimes said that all that is of interest in a book or thesis is to be found in the introduction; moreover, for the most part, the introduction serves either to whet the appetite, to entice the reader to find a comfortable position and to gorge on the printed page, or, at the other extreme, to destroy any former pangs of hunger. Of course I aspire to the former two aims, but nevertheless, hope the reader will bear with me if and when the latter sensation arises.

When I began the research in June 1989, both for this thesis and as a research assistant, my aim was to present the belief system, and to describe the way of living, of a group of people clustered together under the ideological umbrella term of the 'New Age' and within the geographical vicinity of the town of Glastonbury in Somerset, England. Thus my primary concern, if not descriptive, since the study passes through the smokescreen of my interpretation of events, was ethnographic. My methodology was to try to understand the way in which my informants saw their world, and to describe the lifestyle they adopted as a result of their beliefs. Two and a half years on, including fieldwork in Glastonbury between October 1989 and November 1990, my

¹ 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat', Oliver Sacks. ix. 1985. Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.

aim remains constant and this thesis is the result. In this respect the present study differs from that of Tanya Luhrmann² in her excellent investigation of contemporary witchcraft in London which to some extent deals with comparable ethnographic material. Luhrmann describes how people who subscribe to Western scientific 'rationalist' thinking can also adopt magical beliefs, how the two world views can mentally co-exist. I deal with people who are attempting to conduct their entire lives in terms of non-mainstream, New Age values and beliefs. I try instead to explain how they endeavour to develop a way of living which is consistent with their values and beliefs.

However, along the path I have been able to place my observations and increasing familiarity with the New Age movement in the framework of other accounts of communitarian, 'new religious' or utopian movements. For example, Enders Huntington and John Hostetler's studies of the Hutterite and Amish in North America.³ Moreover, as the study evolved, I found a relationship between the data I had collected during the period of my fieldwork in Glastonbury and the current anthropological debate over holism and individualism. It is a discussion over individualism and holism, with particular reference to writings by Louis Dumont which constitute the bulk of the theoretical discussions in this thesis. Thus as the research itself evolved, so did my theoretical interests. It is the complement of this interaction between written sources, theory, and the new ethnographic data that I collected during my year's stay in Glastonbury that I wish to present in this thesis.

Throughout the chapters that follow, I alternate between different names for the group under study; the 'New Agers', the 'Glastafarians' and,

² 'Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present-day England'. Basil Blackwell. 1989.

³ 'Children In Amish Society- Socialization and Community Education'. Hostetler and Huntington. Holt, Rhinehart and Winston. 1971.

most commonly, the 'alternative community'. My informants also alternated between different names. In chapter one I devote some time to the term 'New Age' and in doing so, consider the movement as a whole beyond the geographical vicinity of Glastonbury. The terms 'alternative community' and 'Glastafarian' are also worthy of consideration.

'Glastafarian' is a name given by the group under study to describe themselves, with 'Glastonian' used to describe the remainder of the 'local' population. 'Glastafarian' is a combination of the names 'Glastonbury' and 'Rastafarian'; such an evocation of the black 'Back to Africa' movement describes the sentiment of rebellion and ideological separation from the values and beliefs of mainstream society that is upheld by the group under study in Glastonbury.

The term 'alternative community' also reveals the ethos of separation from, and opposition to, the perceived values of wider British society. Whilst in New Age philosophy it is clear also that anything by way of beliefs is admissible since this corresponds with the supreme value that everyone should be able to do their own thing, some values of wider British society are most definitely not acceptable. From the standpoint of ideology there are definite boundaries between the New Age and wider British society, and this is clearly evident in the friction which exists between the alternative community and the 'local' population. The alternative community sets itself up as an alternative: some perceived values of wider British society most definitely are not accepted. For example, few New Agers come home from work on a Friday night, drink a few pints along with a rare steak in the local pub and look forward to the hearty British ritual of a Sunday lunch with roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Similarly, few members of 'mainstream' society spend a weekend at a 'past life' regression class, meditate at designated sacred sites like Stonehenge, and voluntarily go on raw food diets. Needless to

say there does exist a continuum of involvement with respect to both mainstream and New Age beliefs.

There is a sense in which the New Age community in Glastonbury constitutes a sub-culture. To a large extent, by nature of being an alternative, they define and present themselves in opposition to wider society. British society is thus largely perceived in negative terms; the 'alternative community' criticizes the capitalist, materialist and Thatcherite ethos which they see ignoring both the needs of individuals, and the environmental needs of the planet as a whole. There are unwritten and often verbally unexpressed guidelines to membership in the 'alternative community'. Hairstyles, clothes, choice of drugs, 'attitude', and perception of the 'other' in both the 'local' mainstream population and wider British society: all these are clearly distinctive. Moreover, as I shall show, they also constitute symbolic boundary markers in relation to wider society.

Yet, somewhat ironically, in their strongly individualistic ideological stance, New Age views and actions closely mirror those views associated with the 'New Right', close to the heart of the very Thatcherite system which the alternative community in Glastonbury feel themselves to be so separate from. For example, in Glastonbury we find a phlethora of small businesses started up on the Thatcherite-initiated Enterprise Allowance scheme which gives financial support to small businesses. We find no minimum wage and people working for less than £2/ hour. As a consequence, a free market economy is evolving where business enterprises, and people, either sink or swim.

Finally it is most important in this introduction is to make clear what the alternative community are not. As Luhrmann writes of magicians⁴.

"They are not psychotically deluded, and they are not driven to practice by socio-economic desperation."

Because many 'New Agers' are from a similar background to the majority of readers of this thesis, i.e. white, middle-class and educated, we expect them to have a similar belief and value system to our own. If not, more subtly, we expect to be able ourselves to understand their belief system in terms of our own. When we find we cannot do so, there is a tendency to marginalize their beliefs, and their very identity. For example, when the 'New Age' travellers, the mobile sisters of the alternative community whom I discuss in Chapter Two, hit the media headlines in the late 1980's with their attempts to hold a summer festival, they were dubbed 'hippies' by the media, a term with negative connotations in this context. Little attempt was made by even supposedly sensitive branches of the press or television to sympathetically or even objectively present their case; they were pigeon-holed alongside football hooligans as 'yobbo subversives'. Instead of an approach to these people which attempts to marginalize and pigeon-hole their beliefs, I propose that the New Age movement should be viewed in a more positive light, as one which has built upon and serves to enrich our 'shared' Western culture. For any traps of marginalization I myself have fallen into in this thesis, I apologize in advance.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. I begin with an introductory chapter which serves to inform the reader about the geographical and social location of the study, as well as describing how I

⁴ *ibid* 2 p.7

went about my research on both a personal and methodological basis. I also introduce the term 'New Age', acknowledge it as an ambiguous term and try to present a working definition.

In Chapter Two I look at the 'alternative community' in the context of its locality. I examine the boundaries between this community and the 'local' population, and boundaries within the umbrella term of the 'New Age'. I examine groups within groups. In doing so I raise particular questions about the nature of 'community'.

In Chapter Three begins the 'ethnographic weight' of the thesis. I have structured the ethnography around the theme of individualism and of holism. I have indicated that the alternative community attempt to organize their lives in accordance with distinctive ideological beliefs. Individualism and holism capture the complementary principles evident in these beliefs. But these principles seem not to be universally relevant. In the more practical areas of life [discussed in Chapters Three to Six] individualism appears predominate. But in people's 'contemplation of life' holistic and individualistic principles seem to be of equal weight. I begin my ethnographic investigation by looking at notions of health, with particular reference to the intriguing New Age philosophy of physical immortalism.

In Chapter Four I continue with the theme of individualism and look at attitudes to work. I consider the ways in which people support themselves financially as well as people's attitudes to money.

In Chapter Five I turn to the topic of child-rearing. I look at people's attitudes to children and how both children and the 'child-like' in adults is revered within the alternative community. Under the topics of formal and informal education, I look at the relationship between child and parent, and the attitudes of parents to education. I discuss both a specialist 'New Age' school and the situation where the child is educated

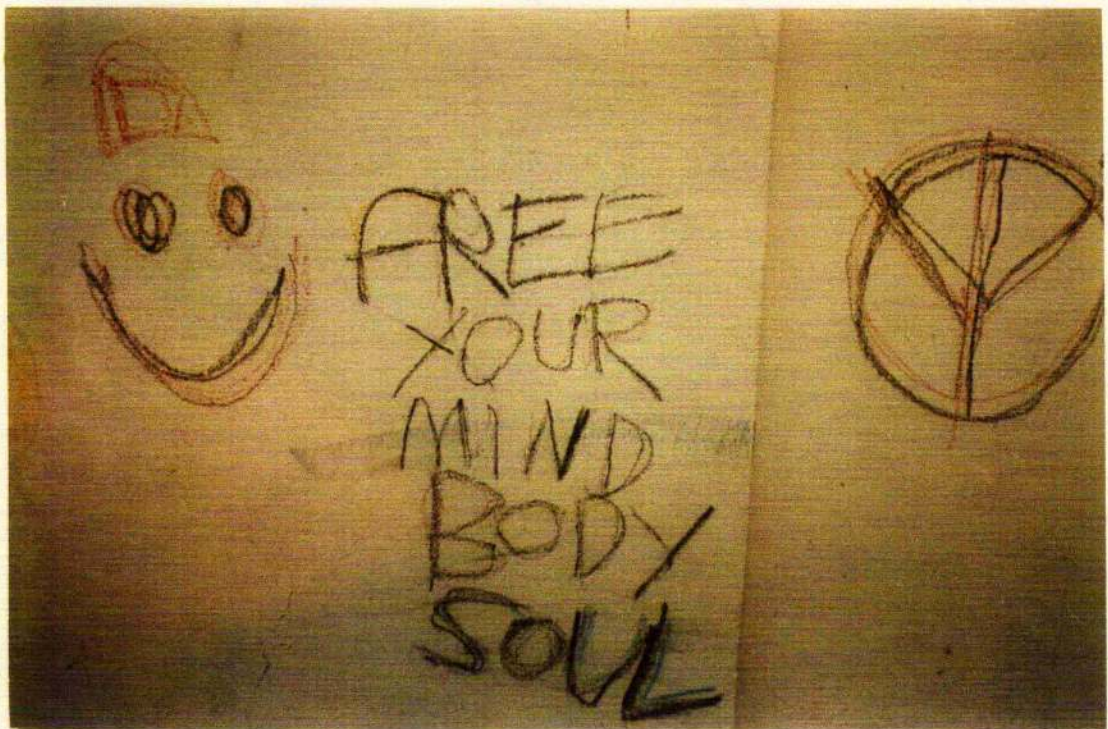
in the larger state school system. Again individualistic themes are revealed.

In Chapter Six I introduce the theme of interpersonal relations. In this I look at how formal roles are down-played and how social interaction revolves round notions of individuality and autonomy.. I also, using a personal case study, introduce a discussion of conflict and indicate how conflict situations are generally resolved in the alternative community. Lastly under this topic, I look at gender roles, and ask how much the new value placed on the feminine by 'New Age' has influenced interaction between the sexes.

In Chapter Seven, the last of my ethnographic chapters, I turn to the contemplative life of the community and discuss the spirituality which is so central to the New Age movement. In contrast to my previous chapters in which the ethnographic material is informed by the value placed by the 'alternative community' upon individualism, evocations of holism are now most clearly significant, if not central. I examine the pertinence of these evocation in relation to the 'alternative community' as a social movement.

Lastly, in Chapter Eight, I turn to my analytical commentary. Contrary to traditional anthropological practice which often places the theoretical before the ethnographic, in this study the ethnography has been presented first in order that the reader might be able to read the ethnography with as few biases as possible. In this chapter I look at former anthropological discussions on individualism and holism, with particular reference to Louis Dumont, and suggest a re-interpretation of the relation between these terms in the light of my ethnographic material.

In a brief final chapter, I examine the alternative community as a utopian movement. Good reading.



Chapter One

'The Scene'

'The New Age'

An umbrella term for any idiosyncratic religious beliefs? A Western movement for social change? A new age? All these are possible characterizations of the New Age. Attempting to reach a concrete definition of the term 'New Age', has been one of the most challenging, and elusive, aspects of this research. 'So what exactly is the New Age movement?' is a casual question from many people, and one which expects a one line answer; impossible. Any attempts at a simple and clear description are undercut by a marked openness among the informants to diverse individual interpretations; moreover, definitions from actors varied according to circumstances and company. Rather than provide myself a definition of New Age as an a priori category, I identified a loose grouping of people and hoped to create and clarify an understanding of the term for myself through the actors' and writers' descriptions and explanations. Accordingly, I present some informants' statements, as well as extracts from literature, which, if nothing else, will throw light upon the diversity of views on the 'New Age'.

Robin

"It's just a personal philosophy, not a movement leading to change."

Sir George Trevelyan, philosopher of the New Age.

"If, however, we can wake up to our relationship to the wholeness of life and the fact that the universe is a vast living organism shot through and

through with creative being, and if we can then channel and co-operate with the energies and forces from that living universe, there is nothing that cannot be solved, even to the possibility of molecular change which could de-pollute the planet."¹

Sally, owner of hotel.

"We are just on the initial stage of the New Age. The end will be totally unrecognizable. Politically things are beginning to change very fast; Sai Baba teaches us that there will be bloodshed in the Middle East and modified nuclear war yet to come."

Person in Glastonbury.

"The New Age is hope."

John, a local music teacher.

"People get involved with the New Age for a number of different reasons; resentment for example. You get alot of women involved who have got divorced and feel very bitter about life. Some people get involved as a form of rebellion and others as a genuine quest. The alternative scene is something you take what you want from."

Doug, retreat leader.

"Sometimes I think the New Age is a mythic representation, a projection or a fantasy in people, resulting from a dis-encharnted generation who realized that they weren't going to change the world, or at least that the world won't change in their lifetime. So they put those feelings on a fantasy level."

¹ "Summons To a High Crusade", Sir George Trevelyan. The Findhorn Press, Forres, 1986. p.41

Alan, counsellor in Glastonbury.

"I associate it with the time following the Harmonic Convergence. Before everyone was dreaming death and now we are dreaming life. There is a new ecological vision where we are suffering from an environmental sickness or cancer. I see the New Age and environmental movement closely associated. They disagree when the ecologists focus on the outer rather than on the inner. Change needs to come from the inside to the outer. Generally society believes we can solve problems rationally but the rational is only part of our processing."

Rosalind Coward, authoress, talk at 'The Watershed', Bristol. 6.2.90

"The New Age is a mixture of spiritualism, self-development and environmentalism. People are more receptive to the forces of nature and nature is seen as something intrinsically good."

Rosalind Coward, conversation in London.

"I first became attracted to writing about the New Age as an increasing number of friends became interested in it and suddenly started to embrace a completely new philosophy. They seemed to take on board a lot of very indistinct woolly beliefs which came under the umbrella term of spirituality. The more one looks at them, the more woolly a lot of them become. It has an evangelistic aspect to it, it is 'an experience'."

Joan, resident in Glastonbury

"The New Age is here. All you have to do is look around you in the town and you can see people living it."

Frank Natale, healer and teacher of New Age ideas

"The word 'new' seems to push a lot of buttons, because it gets everybody locked into space-time which we have all become slaves to despite the fact it is an illusion. Maybe it is best that we do not call it the New Age, but rather the age of consciousness and talk about what is new within this new dimension of consciousness."²

Doug, facilitator.

"Much of what people are caught up in is the trappings and this is what the older religions have been warning people to stay away from for a long time."

Shirley Maclaine, "Dancing in the Light".

"A new age of awareness. An awareness that includes the knowledge that there is indeed a level of dimension that operates in harmony and with perfection, waiting for us to understand that being alive on earth is only a limited aspect of what we truly are."³

William Bloom, "The New Age. An Anthology of Essential Writings."

"I see the New Age phenomenon as the visible tip of the iceberg of a mass movement in which humanity is reasserting its right to explore spirituality in total freedom. The constraints of religious and intellectual ideology are falling away."⁴

Tanya Luhrmann, "Persuasions of the Witch's Craft"

² "The Age of Consciousness", Frank Natale. Kindred Spirit, vol.1 no.12, Totnes. 1990. p.20

³ "Dancing In The Light", Shirley Maclaine. Bantam Books, London. 1985. p.117.

⁴ "The New Age. An Anthology of Essential Writings", ed. William Bloom. Rider, London, 1991. p.xv

"...a broad cultural ideology, a development of the countercultural sixties, which privileges holistic medicine, 'intuitive sciences' like astrology and tarot, ecological and anti-nuclear political issues, and alternative therapies, medicines and philosophers.... Talk about the 'New Age' or Aquarian Age is utopian and idealistic: when it arrives, people will work together, there will be neither hierarchy nor loss of individuality, and science will be used for constructive purposes only."⁵

Rosamund, event organizer in Glastonbury

"We have a new philosophy of life that is spreading with love. Human beings are such sensitive creatures that our thoughts can cause vibrations which, in turn, effect other things, and so the new ideas and way of being is spreading."

In some respects, by their very name, New Agers are a self-defining group; they are, quite literally, those who believe in a New Age. However to leave the analysis, completed, at this point, would be to ignore the myriad of complexities that surround the term and which throw great light upon what I consider to be the individualistic nature of the New Age movement.

The complexity arises in the fact that not all of the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury chose to describe themselves by the term 'New Age' (approximately 10% did not). As I was relying upon informants' statements and comments to build up a notion of what was 'New Age' myself, and as there is no defined creed or text which pre-states what is New Age, this presented a difficulty. It was particularly common for some people to say "no I'm not a New Ager, that's all new

⁵ "Persuasions of a Witch's Craft. Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present-day England." T.M. Luhrmann. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.1989. p.30

fangled American commercialized stuff. No, my guru has been around for ten years, and the spiritual tradition I follow comes from ancient Hindu sources". Or, "No, I'm not a New Ager, I don't believe in putting things off into some futuristic vision, we have to change things now." More cynically, some might echo Bertolt Brecht's words and comment that every generation believes itself to be a New Age.

Such ambivalence towards recognizing the category of New Age and/or identifying oneself with it, can be traced to a number of factors. Firstly, circumstance. For example, let us take a group of people sitting round a table in the courtyard of "The Glastonbury Experience", one of the focal meeting points of the town. They are discussing different spiritual practices, and the anthropologist has raised the subject of what is the New Age. At first the people are somewhat perplexed at what seems a strange question and somewhat out of context to their discussion, but then they begin to discuss the issue. One of the characters, Lisa, is an artist who practices rebirthing, and places great belief in the powers of crystals. She has just told the group that she sleeps every night with a crystal under her pillow. Another character, Doug, is a bereavement counsellor who runs retreats helping people develop a positive attitude to death. He also teaches Tai Chi and meditation. Doug has a degree in philosophy and has a highly analytical worldview.

Lisa: "For me, being in Glastonbury is really important. I feel this place to be a high energy point for the global change in consciousness that is happening. I feel like I am on a shamanic journey to the New Age."

Doug: "You see for you, you are a New Ager, you feel a sense of a growing towards. For me, I look around me and sometimes I see a lot of

disharmony amongst people in Glastonbury. For me, it's just a personal transformation and the more people that happens to the better. But no, I don't feel a New Ager, I don't use crystals."

In relation to Lisa, Doug felt removed from the New Age movement. Her beliefs and reasons for being in Glastonbury amounted to core ideas to which he could not subscribe. However, in subsequent conversations with Doug, particularly in relation to mainstream society, he described himself as feeling part of an 'alternative spiritual scene'. He subscribed to New Age newspapers and even described his home as a New Age centre. To describe his relation to wider society he seemed to affiliate himself with the New Age, yet in a conversation 'on the inside' he distanced himself from the term New Age, which he associated with California, the Big Sur, and crystals. Context and circumstance in linguistic usage echoes Nigel Rapport's discussion of Wittgenstein,

"language ought to be treated as a spatial and temporal phenomenon, an instrument used with intention, a form of action. This calls for a shift in focus from the dictionary and the book of grammar to situations of linguistic performance, for it is here that the significant properties of language are to be discovered."⁶

Furthermore the ambiguity surrounding the term 'New Age' is a reflection of the pervasive individualistic ethos in Glastonbury; such a 'you are how you are' ethos hardly fosters a mood of dogmatic group identity. With the travelling community, collections of people living in vehicles who congregate around Glastonbury, we see this point taken one

⁶ "Talking Violence. An Anthropological Interpretation of Conversation in the City" Nigel Rapport. Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Newfoundland, 1987. p.150.

step further; they state they are a collectivity of individuals and no one traveller can speak for the group, nor for anyone else. I elaborate upon this at a later point in the thesis.

Such a contextualized and flexible use of the term 'New Age' presents a problem for the analyst when identifying the field of study. If the informants under discussion in this thesis are not categorizable under the umbrella term of the New Age, then what? The analyst can possibly ignore such ambiguity and impose the category 'New Age' in a blanket fashion. However to do so would be to ignore the complexity and subtlety of the issue.

Alternatively, I suggest, that any definition or categorization imposed by me, beyond those informants who refer to themselves as 'New Agers', must be explicitly an analytical definition by myself, the analyst, to describe my field of study. However, to allow for the diversity of self-identity within the Glastonbury alternative scene, I suggest a polythetic classification in the tradition of the natural sciences, the Soviet psychologist Vygotsky, and later within anthropology, Rodney Needham. The advantages of polythetic classification are that it allows for diversity; a set of criteria for a group are laid down, to which each member need only fulfill a number of properties in order to be a member. Thus, in zoology, a parallel taxonomy exists in which classes of animals are grouped in family likenesses. Needham writes with the human sciences in mind,

"An important aspect of this procedure... is that an insufficiently discriminative taxonomic concept was replaced by a set of criteria which might be matched only sporadically and in highly various combinations, by the jural institutions of real societies."⁷

⁷ "Against the tranquility of Axioms", Rodney Needham. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. 1983. p.39

Thus I present a polythetic classification of the New Age, which I hope allows for the flexibility and individualism so central to the movement as a whole. It is not necessary for any one individual to fulfil all these criteria in their ideas and activities and it is possible that others outside the New Age movement fulfil some of these criteria.

1] people who declare themselves to believe in a 'New Age' which is either current or approaching. This belief is based upon prophecies such as the Mayan calander and also in the Hopi ideas that humanity is entering a 'new age' of man.

2] people in Western Europe and America who lead a spiritual lifestyle outside the Christian church. The Christian church is described in this regard as 'patriarchal' or 'old age' while the church, in turn, often refers to New Agers as 'paganists' or 'Satanists'.

3] people who practise a spirituality drawing upon a number of traditions, both historical and contemporary.

4] people who place a strong emphasis upon the relationship of humans to nature and/or concern with enviromental issues.

5] people who make an effort to incorporate spiritual ideas into the way they lead their everyday lives, bring up their children, conduct their relationships, clean the house, and so on.

Glastonbury, the town.

Glastonbury is a market town with a population of 7,635, situated in central Somerset. Although the 1980's saw a great movement of people from South-East England to buy property and work or retire in the area, thereby increasing house prices and adding more cars to the roads, it remains a predominantly rural area with mixed agricultural and dairy

farming.. The main industry was, and still is, leather products. With warm summers, a hazy humidity, apple orchards and winding country roads, Somerset is often described as 'sleepy'.

Looking down from the Mendip Hills into the green and flat moorlands that surround Glastonbury, a Tolkein-esque hill with an indistinct tower on top, stands out on the landscape. Often a layer of mist lies low on the ground, adding a sense of mystery to the hill which emerges like an island, and to the surrounding area that is sometimes referred to as Avalon. The hill, known as the Tor, has the remains of an ancient church on top and is one of the most famous landmarks of the area as a whole. It is integral to identity in Glastonbury for many different groups; for some it is a sacred monument, for others it is an historical relic, while others associate it with the tourist industry. Difference and diversity are perhaps the most prominent characteristics of the Glastonbury area. Below are listed some quotations from a wide range of sources, that serve as a useful introduction to the diversity of views as to what constitutes Glastonbury.

John, writer and physical immortalist.

"Glastonbury is the heart chakra"

Jane, mother.

"Glastonbury is full of wierdoes. I say that partly because that's how most of the people I know describe it."

Geoffrey Ashe, writer and historian

"Glastonbury is a beautiful and peaceful place."

"Glastafarian"

"Glastonbury is like a stage set."

"Glastonian"

"I've lived here all my life, why haven't I felt the vibes?"

Local businessman and Quaker,

"I've lived here all my life, and I don't feel there is any particular spiritual power to the place. People come here and impose it, there aren't any vibes on the Tor."

Tom,

"Glastonbury is a place where people come to live out their fantasies."

Marion Bradley, "The Mists of Avalon".⁸

"For as I say, the world itself has changed. There was a time when a traveller, if he had the will and knew only a few of the secrets, could send his barge out into the Summer Sea and arrive not at Glastonbury of the monks, but at the Holy Isle of Avalon; for at that time the gates between the worlds drifted within the mists, and were open, one to another, as the traveller thought and willed. For this is the great secret, which was known to all educated men in our day: that by what men think, we create the world around us, daily new."

Local Methodist minister,

"I don't think Glastonbury is particularly special as an area at all. What is powerful is people's mental associations with the place."

⁸ "The Mists of Avalon", Marion Bradley. Sphere Books, London. 1984.p.ix.

"Glastafarian"

"Glastonbury is a form of anarchy with people trying to re-organize/ re-structure society. As there are no rules it is open to different people's power games."

Dion Fortune, "Glastonbury, Avalon of the Heart".⁹

"Glastonbury is a gateway to the Unseen. It has been a holy place and pilgrim-way from time immemorial, and to this day it sends its ancient call into the heart of the race it guards, and still we answer to the inner voice."

Glastonbury is a town with a strong historical past, which emphasizes religion and myth; it is the legendary 'Avalon' where King Arthur was reputedly buried. With Glastonbury Abbey being the oldest Christian religious foundation in the British Isles, it also has close connections to the Christian church. Joseph of Arimathea reputedly visited the town and brought with him the cup of the Last Supper which he reputedly buried on Chalice Hill, hence the name. Nearby on 'Wearyall Hill', Joseph reputedly stopped to rest and drove his staff into the ground. Legend tells us that there it blossomed into a thorn tree.

The historical identity of the town is consciously maintained by Christians and non-Christians alike. Separate Roman Catholic and Anglican pilgrimages take place each year, and much of the developing 'alternative' tourist industry rests upon the perpetuation of the 'legend of Avalon'. In this section I wish to describe how the 'New Agers' themselves construct an historical identity, which historical aspects they lay emphasis upon and how they describe them. A number of leaflets and

⁹ "Glastonbury, Avalon of the Heart" Dion Fortune. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough. 1986. First edition, 1934. p.2

booklets have been printed and are sold in the area on Glastonbury from a New Age perspective, and it is upon these I wish to draw to introduce the history of the town.

1) The Tor - as I have mentioned previously, the Tor stands out as a prominent landmark on the horizon. It is used as a site for pilgrimage, group ritual and individual contemplation on a daily basis; it is only on the coldest or stormiest days of winter that one cannot look up and see people scattered like sheep on its slopes. The hill is imbued with sacred properties. It is often described in pagan religious terms as the door to the underworld, where souls enter at death before re-emerging in a new life-time. A publication describes this,

"Guarding the entrance to Annwn/ Avalon was Gwynn ap Nudd - Gwynn, son of Nudd, lord of the Otherworld. An ancient local tradition locates his palace on the Tor. Here he is known as the 'King of Faery'; and periodically he rides out with other members of the 'Wild Hunt', taking the souls of the deceased back into the Otherworld on his return. Accompanying him is Art-thwr, a mythical ancestor of Arthur....a link which solidly locates him with Avalon."¹⁰

While the Tor is seen as a symbol for entry into 'another world', its slopes also represent the Goddess. Although to some, the hill with a tower on top surrounded by flat moorland may appear a blatantly phallic symbol, to Goddess-worshippers, the rolling sides and rounded shape are more indicative of a female form,

"From a distance the most noticeable feature on the Isle of Avalon is the Tor as she rises out of the flat Summerlands. She sits like a

¹⁰ 'The Cauldron and the Grail', Nick Mann. 1985. Annenterprise, Glastonbury. p.6.

Great Goddess, a huge bounteous female figure in the middle of a landscape bowl or Cauldron. To see her is to love her."¹¹

While the rotundity of the Tor evokes a female figure, the sculpted outline suggests to some that the sides have been artificially shaped in the form of a maze, following the style of the Cretan maze. The maze spirals round the outside of the hill seven times with seven continuous terraces and vertical connections between them. Its function?

"It is a ritual maze and needs to be walked with awareness and reverence. It is a sacred rite of passage."¹²

2) The Chalice Well - the second main area of 'legendary interpretation and reinterpretation' is the Chalice Well. Near the foot of the Tor the Well is fed by a spring which rises from Chalice hill, where the Chalice from the Last Supper is reputedly buried, and hence the name. A walled garden surrounds the well and for a small admission price people can enter, look at the well and spend some time in the voluptuous gardens that have been created around it. It is another popular place for meditation and individual contemplation, a 'sacred space'. The spring inside the garden (there is also one outside with a tap) is called the 'Blood Spring' due to an iron-red deposit left on the stones over which it passes. This, of course, lends itself to its own interpretation,

"There is the difficult question of menstrual blood to consider. Was the Earth bleeding between two hills - both closely resembling human anatomy - suggestive of the menstrual cycle to the Celts? If it was, was it seen as a sign of life and fertility, or as the final

¹¹ 'The Goddess in Glastonbury', Kathy Jones. Ariadne Publications. Glastonbury 1990. p.42.

¹² *ibid* 11.p.46

phase in the cycle of a woman which prepared her for her power?
Destructive in its power of Renewal?"¹³

Just as in the education of children we see the replication of the values of the 'adult world' in the presentation of the past we see the construction of a current identity. In the 'New Age' interpretation of the history of Glastonbury we see certain aspects of their culture revealed. For example, great emphasis is placed upon the sacredness of particular sites like the Tor or Chalice Well; they are believed to have in themselves great 'spiritual energy' that can be felt and tapped into by humans who are sensitive to it. Secondly, an historical past that has previously been described in terms of the development of Christianity and male figures like Joseph of Arimathea, is re-invented and re-told with an emphasis upon pagan and Celtic figures, as well as the feminine and the Goddess.

In another way, contemporary Glastonbury presents itself in terms of its historical past. With just one main street of shops posters of the Tor and books on the history of Glastonbury from both 'traditional' and 'alternative' perspectives stand out from the shop windows. There are a growing number of shops marketed to specifically cater for an 'alternative' tourist industry which sell New Age books, perfume oils, crystals and trinkets. These shops tend to be concentrated at the bottom of the High Street, and particularly around the two main social focal points of the alternative community that I describe below.

Firstly, the Assembly Rooms is set back one layer of buildings from the main High Street. With plants surrounding the stone steps, the occasional busker, broadly striped cream and brown double doors, the odd dog lying in the sun awaiting its owner and 'Assembly Rooms'

¹³ *ibid* 11, p12

emblazoned in red letters above the door, it is unmistakably part of the alternative community.. Inside, amidst trailing plants and bright posters, is a cafe which sells a variety of vegetarian food, and a particularly thick and soup-like coffee. Children run around, chasing each other under the legs of tables, and a few people who have settled themselves in for the morning sit and roll cigarettes. Occasionally the door swings open into the main hall where the resident theatre company may be rehearsing, or an exhibition of paintings being mounted. The Assembly Rooms is the forum for many discussions, plays and musical events. However it is also the subject for dispute. Some people feel that it is too heavily dominated by travellers who might put off 'straights' from coming into the cafe; in turn, the travellers resent what they see as bigotry.

During the period of my fieldwork, the Assembly Rooms was the centre of much factionalism and division between sub-groups. In a discussion with a group of women who wanted to take over the cafe, one woman suggested that the only way to completely change the 'energy' would be to ask the Women's Institute to take over the cafe. Another woman said,

"I feel it is a very negative place just now. The people in there are possibly even into black magic. I would like to fill it with lighter, female energies."

The building was owned by a board of trustees who hoped to pay the mortgage by renting out the different rooms and facilities. For example a small computer facilities business rented out one room. However in an interesting development since the end of the period of fieldwork, the building has been sold by the trustees and is in the process of being re-bought in a system of shared ownership, each share costing £500. An elected 'steering committee' hope to have enough money to buy

back the building and also to refurbish it as a 'sacred space'. The building is described as being central to a sense of community,

"At different times throughout its history the Assembly Rooms has been at the heart of the Avalonian community. It is here we have held community gatherings, danced, sung, listened to music....."¹⁴

The second social focal point is just a few shops down from the Assembly Rooms but with a very different atmosphere; 'The Glastonbury Experience.' This is a courtyard of buildings, whose most significant initial feature is its smell. With a vegan cafe and bakery, the smell of baking herbs and spices fills the courtyard, to mix with the incense continually burning from the perfume oils shop. The courtyard is a sun trap, and on a hot day one could well close one's eyes and imagine oneself in a completely different part of the world. Filled with tables and chairs, people sit outside, talk, sell jewellery and old books, and play guitars. In the centre is an ornamental carved wooden seat, with a signpost above which points to the different enterprises. The atmosphere in the Glastonbury Experience is very different from that of the Assembly Rooms; there is no thick black coffee.

A wooden staircase runs along the second floor and leads to recording studios, storerooms and to a large community space which is rented out for workshops, yoga, concerts and therapy groups. The buildings are owned by one woman who rents out the rooms to different enterprises individually. At the other end of the courtyard is the 'Healing Wing' which consists of a number of different rooms used specifically for healers to practice, and individual and small group meditation.. An

¹⁴ "Shareholders to Buy Assembly Rooms", by Kathy Jones. "Glastonbury Times", Summer 1991. p.12.

information centre combines the activities and books appointments with individual therapists.

With the exotic smells, a statuette of a woman holding a crystal ball and the range of differing healing techniques, one feels one has been surrounded by a self-conscious tranquility. This is further emphasized by a chapel which is left open for individual meditation. A book lies open for people to record their thoughts and prayers to share with the next visitor. Flowers are brought to decorate it. One is surrounded by an air of religiosity.

Glastonbury, the 'alternative community'.

At this point, it might well be asked, and who are these people? In a later chapter I shall examine some life histories elicited from informants describing how they saw themselves becoming involved in the New Age movement. For the purposes of this section I confine myself to describing people 'as they live' in the Glastonbury area.

The town of Glastonbury has a population of 7,635. (1990 figures provided by the Mendip District Council) Of this number within the town, I estimate that around 500 of them come within my loose category of the New Age, extended to 700 to include out-lying communities and villages nearby. This is indeed a 'loose' category since I decided not to use any form of statistical analysis, and so rely upon personal estimation. The population is in a constant state of flux and so any analysis of numbers would have to be done bi-monthly, to trace the comings and goings. During the spring and summer time a mobile population of travellers and visitors arrive, particularly over the summer solstice on June 21st when the town swells to three or four times its usual size as people arrive for the famous 'Glastonbury C.N.D. Festival' just outside of Glastonbury. As

the incomers increase some of the long-term winter residents leave; to travel, to attend courses, or to do a few last minute repairs to an old living vehicle, paint some stars on the bumper and go 'back on the road' for a summer of travelling around from one festival to another.

People who reside in the town of Glastonbury live predominantly in council and private flats, and bedsits. 'Glastonians' will complain that you can tell the house belongs to a 'hippie' by its unkempt garden, semi-dressed children, dogs and large numbers of old cars outside. Other, more affluent, New Agers have bought larger houses with secluded gardens, stripped wooden floors, hand-made furniture and fitted kitchens. However, if we move out from the immediate town area of Glastonbury we find a wider range of living styles. While many live in farm cottages, others, including the anthropologist, live communally, often in rented old farmhouses.

It has also become common for people to buy a field and live on it, much to the anxiety of local councillors who claim the land was sold for agricultural usage only. Varying forms of 'housing' develop; caravans, dome structures, and tipis are common, with the occasional living trailer or erected 'bender' a dwelling similar to a tent, usually made from branches of wood for the basic structure and then covered with plastic. Often benders are attached to the side of a vehicle or a tree. Many of the people living this way do so throughout the winter, often with no electricity, and using fresh water supplies.

To speak of these people as the 'alternative community' is perhaps misleading, for it suggests a blanket group of people leading uniform lifestyles, a notion I question later in my discussion of community. As I have already suggested in the description of the town social focal points, the Glastonbury Experience and the Assembly Rooms, there are a number of differing sub-groups; groups which are in a continual state of flux as

new allegiances are struck. Many people associate with others involved in the same or similar spiritual practice or therapy, and as these change, so do affiliations. The visual or symbolic distinctions between sub-groups are subtle and not always immediately obvious. Moreover, as the claims to community lie predominantly in the domain of notions, the 'alternative community' at times appears disparate and dispersed.

Personal Experience of fieldwork

"Imagine yourself set down...at a desk in an old manor house in Somerset. The house is filled with plants, and Tibetan gods and goddesses decorate the walls. A chime sounds from the room below and seems to hit a ray of sunlight arching into the room. As the daffodils in the field outside turn in the wind, a small group perform Tai Chi. A twirl of smoke from burning incense escapes through the seventeenth century windows, spiraling into the cold air."

"Imagine yourself set down", those immortal words of anthropology that take us from a Pacific island to a letter to a friend from fieldwork in Glastonbury, England. Mud hut to manor house; the former fulfils our stereotype of the faceless other, the foreign, the exotic, the subject of study. The latter perhaps conjures up an image of 'home', the traditional anthropologist hanging up 'his' safari hat and settling down in a leather armchair with a large glass of whisky and exotic tales of far away places.

My study was not only in 'England's pastures green', but furthermore, only a few miles from the village where I had spent my childhood, and with a group of people whose arrival in Glastonbury had coincided with my own birth in the 1960's. However as the bumpy

country bus brought me once again to this town in October 1989, my purpose for being there had changed; what had been the 'familiar' had become the object of study. As more and more anthropologists return to their 'native lands' to carry out research, these stereotypical images of fieldwork are challenged, and new issues brought to the fore. Not least of these is the issue of an assumed 'clearer understanding' through sharing the wide culture of the social group under study. The role of 'native' is superseded by that of analyst. As Marilyn Strathern writes,

"It is clear that simply being a 'member' of the overarching culture or society in question does not mean that the anthropologist will adopt appropriate local cultural genres. On the contrary he/she may well produce something quite unrecognizable. Commonsense descriptions are set aside. Indigenous reflection is incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so there is always the discontinuity between indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself."¹⁵

It was the categories of similarity and difference, the familiar and the different, the 'foreign' and the 'home', and the resulting 'professionally induced schizophrenia'¹⁶, that formed a large part of my fieldwork.

The similarities were perhaps what made access to the field of study easiest. Geographically, I knew the area well and had a pretty good idea of the differing social groups in the locality. A large number of 'alternative' incomers arrived in Glastonbury in the sixties and seventies, and their festivals, appearance and lifestyles were a constant source of

¹⁵ "The Limits on Auto-Ethnography", by Marilyn Strathern in Anthony Jackson, ed. "Anthropology At Home", Tavistock Publications, London. 1987. p.18.

¹⁶ "The Native Anthropologist: constraints and strategies in research", Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes in Anthony Jackson ed. "Anthropology at Home", Tavistock Publications, London. 1987. p.180.

debate in pubs, town halls and council offices. The vicar of the village where I lived described an astrology camp as 'black magic' and warned people to keep their children away. My own parents, though 'straights', took a more liberal and sympathetic attitude to the colourful incomers.

In 1987, I spent the summer in Glastonbury carrying out an anthropological study of a big New Age event, the 'Harmonic Convergence'¹⁷. My basic knowledge of the area gave me a headstart in my research; I was familiar with the terms 'Glastonians' and 'Glastafarians' to describe locals and 'alternative' incomers, I had an idea of social focal points, and even a few contacts in the community. Furthermore my lifestyle was compatible with that of the alternative community in some ways; I had been a vegetarian for a number of years, was interested in environmental issues, and experimental forms of lifestyle.

When I returned to Glastonbury in October of 1989 to carry out a year's fieldwork, these similarities continued to help me find appropriate behaviour to gain access to the community. Although I made a point of telling people I was an anthropologist, as a young woman in her twenties, on a superficial glance I easily pass for a New Ager. Unlike most anthropologists, my presence as 'intruder' was not immediately apparent through native language barriers or colour of skin. I tried to reinforce this by taking an empathetic role in my fieldwork methods. My methodology was participant observation and 'total immersion'. I tried to avoid any formal interview situations as much as possible, and used a tape-recorder only on two occasions when I visited a centre and felt they expected formal interview techniques. More often I would use a notebook when

¹⁷ The 'Harmonic Convergence' was an event of great importance in New Age Circles. It was believed that on August 16-17th 1987, great 'healing energies' would be directed to the earth, and thousands of people collected on 'sacred sites' to receive them.

talking to people, but mostly I tried to participate and observe conversations, and if necessary make a dive for the nearest toilet to scribble it all down. Although I would ask leading questions, I tried not to direct conversations into 'data-gathering' sessions but rather to be included in them and to let any information evolve in the discussion. My use of a camera was largely restricted to what could pass for 'tourist snaps'. My aim was to emulate the lifestyle of my informants, and my method, in true New Age style, was to 'go with the flow'. In the words of Ladislav Holy, I attempted to be an 'observing participant', rather than a 'participant observer'.¹⁸

My first challenge on my arrival in Glastonbury was to find somewhere to live and some means of meeting people. I put up a notice looking for accommodation in 'The Glastonbury Experience' and soon received a phonecall describing an enticing manor house outside Glastonbury which put on retreats and ran Tai Chi classes. Unlike Malinowski on his Pacific Island, my field of study were not so tight-knit geographically and so I was anxious that my living situation would be immediately located within a 'New Age' environment. A few days later we were moving in. For most of the period of my fieldwork, my partner Anthony was present; as an American, a philosopher and a good friend he provided not only support and company but countless insights and a punchball for ideas.

Having found somewhere to live, my next and hardest task, was to find some means of access to the alternative community; there was a limit to the amount of time I could sit in cafes hoping to meet people. Through a contact where I was living I got a job serving and washing

¹⁸ "Theory, Methodology and the research process", Ladislav Holy, in "Ethnographic Research, a guide to general conduct", ed. Roy Ellen. ASA. Academic Press. 1984.p.22

dishes in a vegan restaurant. I then began to help produce an 'alternative' newspaper which gave me a daily reason for being in town as well as a position in the centre of the information nexus. The alternative community in Glastonbury is very fluid, many people come and stay for a few months only, and so it assimilates outsiders easily. The immediate pre-requisite for membership is 'attitude'. Before long, I was attending a women's group, yoga, crystal workshops, spiritual healing, full moon meditations and weekend-long 'spiritual retreats'.

It was at this point that the differences between myself, as the analyst, and the New Age, as my subject of study, began to emerge. My appearance and familiarity of lifestyle and culture had helped me gain access. However all the while that I attempted to totally immerse myself in New Age culture, both my role as an analyst, and my own values and beliefs, separated me. Much of my time was spent participating in rituals, conversations and reading literature about the New Age. It is a culture which places high value upon self-expression; it is also an evangelistic culture. In many of the workshops, rituals and even general conversations, I would be put in a position where I was expected to express my most private emotions. To answer honestly and yet also retain a degree of detachment and privacy was sometimes awkward. As the months passed, I learnt the 'language' and thus was able to express myself in an appropriate way. However in situations where closer relationships developed and my different value system became evident, people were frustrated and alienated by it.

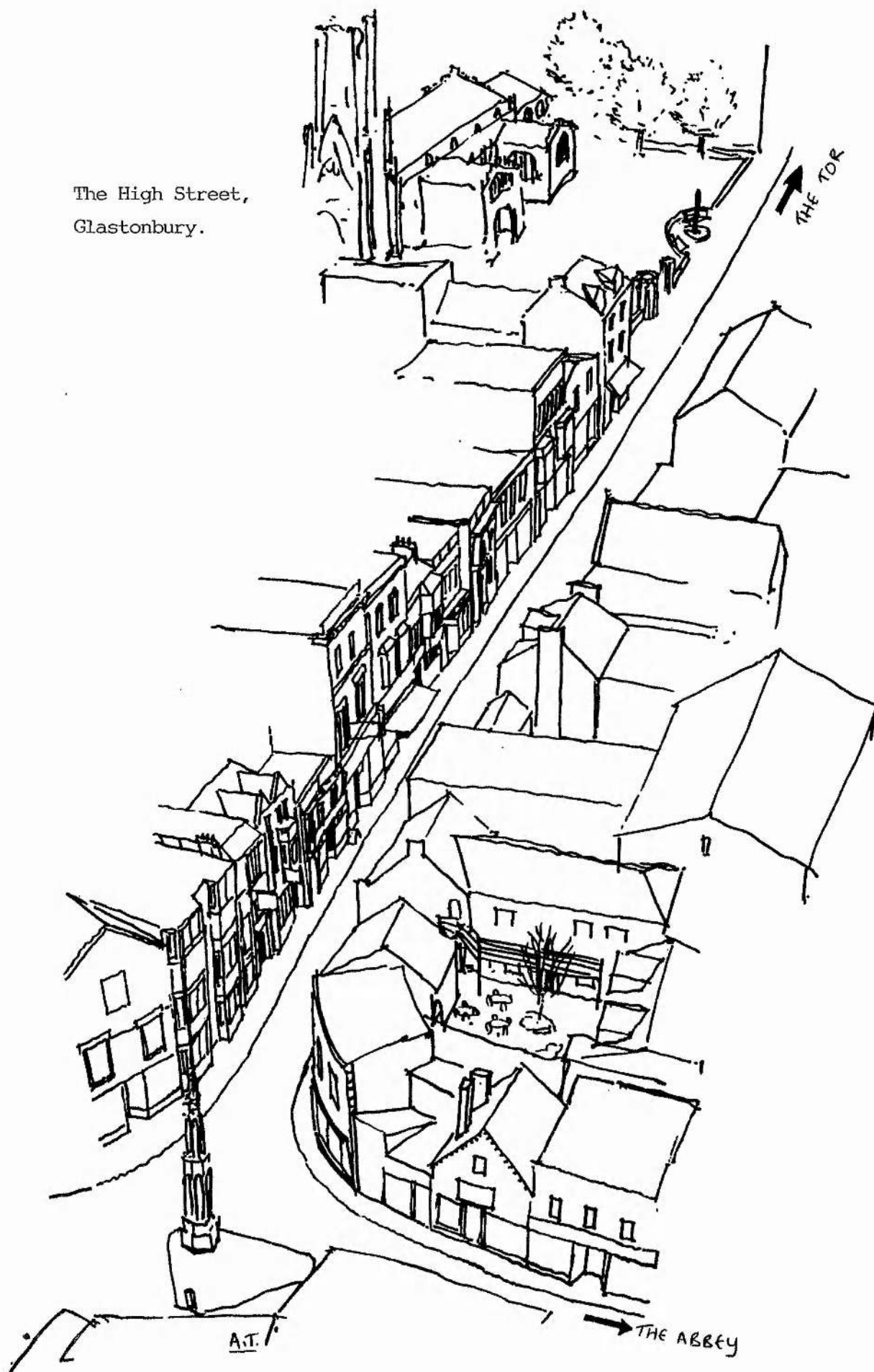
Although I always perceived myself as being 'different' from New Age beliefs, this is not to say that my own values and worldview did not change during the course of the fieldwork. Being surrounded by an atmosphere which places so much emphasis upon the spiritual, the emotional, the intuitive and the magical, it is difficult not to start to see

the new meanings, hidden coincidences and new ways of interpreting events oneself. Tanya Luhrmann¹⁹ refers to this as the 'interpretive drift' as she describes in her ethnography on contemporary witchcraft how people with a 'scientific rationale' incorporate magical ideas into their worldview. Looking back, for example, I remember private conversations with Anthony during the fieldwork period where we presented ideas to each other in New Age terminology and with New Age associations, such as saying "I had an intuition" rather than perhaps "it occurred to me", or "I thought that."

Thus perhaps my personal experience of fieldwork can best be summed up in terms of the tension between similarity and difference. My aim was to build upon similarities in order to construct a bridge between myself and my subject of study. Unlike the white colonial observer, I was able to become metaphorically 'part of the furniture' on occasions. However, I remained separated not only by my role as observer and analyst, but also by my own value system. Thus the familiar becomes the exotic.

¹⁹ "Persuasions of the Witch's Craft", T.M. Luhrmann. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. 1989. p.312.

The High Street,
Glastonbury.



Chapter Two

'The 'alternative community'; boundaries within and without.'

Introduction

"People's perspectives on the social world can be thought of as comprising a large but finite number of social categories or groups, standing in various kinds of relationships with each other: distant/close, above/below, inclusive/exclusive and so on. Usually members of different categories or groups are thought to share certain attributes or characteristics. These are the behavioural, attitudinal and mental characteristics which we usually call stereotypes."¹

Members of the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury will be quick to tell you that as an incomer social group, they are not a recent and post-sixties phenomenon; they will cite the visits of Thomas Hardy to the music evenings in the Assembly Rooms in the nineteenth century, the music-drama school of Rutland Boughton and the writings of occultist Dion Fortune in the 1930's as an examples of the historical presence of music, myth and imagination in Glastonbury. In contrast, local people, in what has been a rural farming area and market town, will say that these days there seem to be more 'hippies' around. It started in the 1970's with the Worthy Farm festivals, just a few miles out of Glastonbury, where

¹ 'Shetlanders and Incomers: Change, Conflict and Emphasis In Social Perspectives,' Graham McFarlane. From 'The Structure of Folk Models', ed. Holy and Stuchlik. ASA Monograph.20, Academic Press, 1981.p.119-120

people reputedly danced around naked. Now, locals say, more and more 'hippies' are coming to the town, are on the roads and in the shops.

Here we find two groups co-existing within the same geographical area who evoke different versions of an historical past. As I shall elaborate further in this chapter, they also attribute a differing set of characteristics, or stereotypes, in relation to each other. In 1987, at the time of my preliminary study, the 'alternative community' referred to the two categories as 'Glastonians' for the traditional locals, and 'Glastafarians' for people attracted to the area on the basis of its spiritual or mystical powers; indeed multi-coloured T-shirts and bumper stickers on cars appeared emblazoned "Jah Glastafari". However in recent years the boundary between the 'alternative' community and the rest of the town is played down by the alternative community for reasons, which again, I shall elaborate upon later; local people are referred to as 'locals' or 'straights' by the alternative community, and the alternative community are called 'the hippies' by locals.

I differentiate between these two groups on the basis of people who live in or move to the Glastonbury area because of spiritual/mystical powers they associate with it and/or the resulting community drawn around this association, and people who live in/move to the area on the basis of other reasons such as work, family connections etc. Although the Glastonbury area is predominantly rural with quite a settled and homogeneous 'indigenous' population, there have always been incomers in the locality, particularly people drawn in to work for Clarks Shoes in nearby Street. In a manner similar to Graham McFarlane's description of 'incomers' in the Shetlands, these people tended to make a positive effort to become part of the more traditional elements of the community, and were thus assimilated,

"many of the first incomers had (and still have) a rather cosy view of life in Shetland, they pursued the meaningful "community"; as a consequence, these individuals tended to establish their closest relations with the bearers of Shetland tradition, the older Shetlanders. These older Shetlanders seemed to create the incomers' links to the community, in the sense that it was they who helped to forge the reputations attributed to the incomers. Having a reputation, these incomers came to "belong" to different local communities."²

However, with increased immigration into Glastonbury people were not absorbed in the same way. Moreover the new kind of incomers have set themselves up as being different from mainstream society; precisely since they see themselves as part of an 'alternative community', they do not seek out relationships with the 'bearers' of Somerset tradition. They have created a separate grouping which has its own rules and modes of behaviour existing apart from, and sometimes in opposition to the pre-existing culture.

In this chapter I intend to attempt to place the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury in the context of its locality. I refer to Anthony Cohen who views community as a symbolic construct and identifies the presence of it on the basis of how actors use the term and where they evoke it³. Correspondingly I identify the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury and discuss how notions of community are evoked. I then examine the community in relation to its boundaries, both in respect to larger society and sub-groups within the apparent core. However firstly I intend to take a number of biographies to exemplify in

² *ibid.* p.127

³ 'The Symbolic Construction of Community' by Anthony Cohen. Ellis Horwood Ltd, London. 1985.

greater detail and individual context how individuals come to live in Glastonbury, and to see themselves as members of an 'alternative community'.

Biographies

Sean

Born in the Somerset town of Bridgwater in 1958, Sean's parents were local tradespeople. At school he remembered himself as being very musical, a member of the school choir and the school orchestra. When he reached his mid-teens he became involved in the school C.N.D. group and amongst the peace literature came across the life story and pacifist teachings of Gandhi who he says has become one of the main influences in his life. He stayed on at school to do A'levels, becoming involved in a local rock band which led him to move to Bristol at the end of school to live in a large house full of young people and perform from time to time. After a couple of years he decided to go to university and to pursue his interest there in philosophy. Later, somewhat dissatisfied with the analytical nature of Western philosophy, he travelled to India and South America where he had a series of spiritual experiences where he felt himself to be in direct contact with God. Back in Britain, he felt his life had been changed and went to live in an isolated cottage in the countryside where, supported financially by social security, he spent his time reading the written works of many teachers and composing music. When he married he and his wife moved nearer to Glastonbury and he became increasingly involved with the meditation and discussion groups meeting there. After a few years, as he made more and more contacts, he began to compose short pieces of music for a 'New Age' video company and to lead a meditation class himself.

Marion

Marion was born in 1940 in the South-East of England. She left school at the age of 16 and took a job as a secretary working in London. At the age of 21 she married and stopped working shortly afterwards when she became pregnant with her first child. Her husband was a senior manager in a catering business and so they were financially comfortable. Over the next ten years she had four children and, although she did no paid work, she was a very active member of parent teacher organizations as well as becoming elected onto the parish council of the village in which they were living. Her husband's job transferred the family to Glastonbury in the late 1970's. Very soon Marion started attending workshops and courses in Glastonbury on such subjects as meditation and realizing one's full potential. She started to feel that, having as a woman raised four children, she never received any recognition for her actions and this in the long term had led to a lack of self-worth. Furthermore she began to feel that the life-style of the family was too materialist and that she wanted to move to a smallholding and become self sufficient. However her husband and teenage children were not willing to make this sacrifice and so she left the house and them. Soon afterwards she moved into a rural shared house and started attending the meetings of a regular spiritual group who met on a weekly basis. The group had decided not to live communally although they kept close contacts with each other throughout the week. She became an active participant in 'community' affairs and started a small business on the 'Enterprise Allowance' scheme.

Stephen

Stephen was born in 1945. He did well at school, despite prolonged periods of asthmatic illness as a child. He was encouraged by his parents

to take up a profession and so he joined an accountancy firm when he left school at 18 and worked his way up. He stayed with the same firm for twelve years. As time passed he began to have a lot more asthma attacks, particularly when he was suffering from stress. He also began to suffer severe stomach complaints and at the age of 30 was diagnosed as having a stomach ulcer. At the same time he started to attend a local rebirthing group (a therapy which re-enacts the individual moment of birth as a positive as opposed to negative, experience- see chapter on 'spirituality') In the group he learnt that his asthma was related to his reluctance to breathe when he was first born. Apparently he had not been ready to come out of his mother's womb, but was forced to and had as a consequence spent a life being coerced by others to do things he did not really want to do. Through his contacts with the group he met a number of people living in Glastonbury and became more and more attracted to the place. Eventually he decided to give up his job and move there to find a more satisfying and less stressful way of living. He also felt it would be his way of re-birthing his life. Once in Glastonbury he supported himself financially by doing part-time book keeping for small businesses, and some hours helping in a shop. He began to fast for a day at a time regularly, to eat only raw foods and to become an active helper with arts events in the town, as well as attend the rebirthers support group on a weekly basis. He felt he had found somewhere where he could be accepted for himself and his own emotional and environmental needs. He is currently buying a piece of land with a number of others which they hope to use to grow food, and as an 'outdoor space'.

Rachel

Rachel was born in 1963 in Wales. Her parents were both doctors with high expectations for their children. Rachel was sent to a private school

which she did not particularly enjoy and was very quiet and introverted until her mid-teens. At the age of fifteen/sixteen she started to rebel against what she saw as the repressive atmosphere and rules of the school. She started to visit music festivals during the summer with like-minded friends, listened to music and experimented with different drugs. Meanwhile her parents, horrified at their daughter's behaviour, tried to restrict her activities and get her to pay more attention to her schoolwork. As a result, Rachel found her situation at home intolerable, and began to look for ways to leave. She had met a Canadian man, Rob, who was living in a bus with a convoy of other travellers and their vehicles, who she began to have a relationship with. His visa had expired and he was considering moving back to Canada. One day Rachel came home and announced to her parents that she had married the man and she was leaving home to live with him in the bus. After six months Rachel became pregnant and gave birth to her first child at the age of seventeen. She spent the following six years as a traveller with Rob and had another child. During this period she had no contact with her parents. Towards the end of this period, her relationship with Rob was deteriorating; Rachel was fed up with looking after two children on the move with little or no help or support from him. She also suspected he was seeing other women. On the basis of a strong intuition confirmed by a tarot card reading she packed up her possessions and took the children, arriving on the doorstep of a friend's house in Glastonbury. She was rehoused in a council house in Glastonbury, is working part-time in a cafe and re-establishing her relationship with her parents.

From these biographies I hope the reader will be able to place in context how, through a series of events, these individuals came to live in Glastonbury. As well as providing a sense of background to the

'alternative community' which I am concerned with identifying in this chapter, I would like to draw out the following points from these descriptions;

- 1] There is a continuum of involvement in the alternative community; while some like Rachel have never held jobs or status roles in mainstream British society, many people such as Marion and Stephen have held/currently hold 'traditional' job or status roles, such as a housewife or accountant.
- 2] Although people may have strong spiritual/emotional experiences which act as a catalyst to their involvement in New Age beliefs in general and Glastonbury specifically, it is a more complex process than a sudden conversionary experience and is related to a number of factors such as change of life-style, relationships and working roles.
- 3] "A new definition of evidence, new assumptions, new common knowledge - these changes systematically alter the way yet-to-be interpreted events are noticed, organized and analysed."⁴

As Luhrmann suggests in her detailed description of initiation into contemporary witchcraft in England, the acceptance of magical beliefs by hitherto secular and scientific people is not so much what is sometimes described as a sudden acceptance of the 'irrational', but an 'interpretive drift'; the slow absorption of a new set of values, beliefs and interpretation of the events of everyday life. Thus as Stephen became increasingly involved with the rebirthing group their explanation of his 'negative birth experiences' became more and more of an explanatory factor for his asthma and stomach ulcer. As he took on the values and

⁴ 'Persuasions of the Witch's Craft. Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present-day England' by T.M. Luhrmann. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.1989.p.176.

explanations of the group he found reasonable justifications and explanations for giving up his job and moving to Glastonbury.

Notions of community

Rosabeth Moss Kantor⁵ has identified historically three waves of utopian communities in North America; firstly, up to 1845 she notes a religious base, such as the 'Aurora' or 'Bethel' communities. From the mid- nineteenth century onwards with a sense of individual dislocation surrounding the fast growth of industrialism, the communities that were founded began to acquire a political or economic theme. During this period we see the Shakers and Oneida community, both groups producing goods such as furniture or steel traps. The third period arises in the 1960's where the so-called 'commune' was attributed with a psycho-social base. All such groups are highly diverse in their beliefs, values and social organization; the celibate Shakers would no doubt be horrified to be categorized with the 1960's Children of God⁶ who used the technique of 'flirty fishing', acquiring new members by sexual favours. However they all hold in common the basis of being a residential community within a confined geographical area. But the alternative community in Glastonbury, definitely a Utopian community, does not have such a referent; with a geographical spread over a ten mile radius as well as being highly differentiated in age, occupation and diversity of specifics of belief, the question may well be raised whether, and in what sense, it comprises a community.

⁵ "Commitment and Community - Communes and Utopias In Sociological Perspective", Rosabeth Moss Kantor. Harvard University Press, Boston. 1972. p.2.

⁶ 'Salvation and Protest- Studies of Social and Religious Movements', Roy Wallis. Francis Pinter, London. 1979. p.69.

Taking the evolutionary perspective of the Chicago school⁷, inspired at least in part by Emile Durkheim's famed shift from mechanic to organic solidarity, community has in the history of anthropological ideas to comprise face-to-face encounters and close personal knowledge. In such a definition, such a dispersed group as the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury would not constitute a community. Nevertheless community is a term widely used in Glastonbury, by 'New Agers', and outsiders alike. However, more recent studies of community have provided a broader interpretation of the term which takes contemporary actor's models into account. For example, Benedict Anderson, writing about community on the level of nation state, describes community as 'imagined',⁸

"It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion...

In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."

Taking a similar approach and applying it to communities on the level of settlement or locality of smaller scale, than the nation states Anderson primarily describes, Anthony Cohen proposes a definition of community by 'use'⁹

⁷ 'The Symbolic Construction of Community', Anthony Cohen. 1985, Ellis Horwood. London. p.21

⁸ 'Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism', by Benedict Anderson. Verso, London. 1984. p.19.

⁹ 'The Symbolic Construction of Community', Anthony Cohen. 1985, Ellis Horwood Ltd. p.19.

"...the community itself and everything within it, conceptual as well as material, has a symbolic dimension, and, further, that this dimension does not exist as some kind of consensus of sentiment. Rather it exists as something for people 'to think with'. The symbols of community are mental constructs: they provide people with the means to make meaning. In doing so, they also provide them with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them."

With the notion of a conceptual, imagined, symbolic community in mind, let us turn to the alternative scene in Glastonbury and to the biographies. Although for all four individuals the motivation for coming to Glastonbury were quite different, there was a common feeling that they would be surrounded by like-minded people and have a sense of 'belonging' to the place.¹⁰ Furthermore they hold a common set of values as important. Every such informant I encountered in Glastonbury considered the area to be 'spiritually significant' in some way; it was common to attribute a concentration of spiritual energy, described as an animating and manipulative power, to the area. The main focal points for such a power are the Tor and to the Chalice Well. Over the winter and summer solstice it is common for people to gather on these two points as well as being common places for regular and individual meditations. Even people who do not seek out these places for use in this way would recognize them as focal symbols for the area, and part of 'belonging' to the alternative community; in conversation an assumed reverence surrounds discussion of these places as sacred. Perhaps Rachel will look to the Tor and see it as the 'Goddess' to be prayed to, Sean may see its

¹⁰ a concept further developed by A. Cohen in 'Belonging, Identity and Social Organization In British Rural Communities', Manchester University Press.1986

Tolkein-like figure appear on the horizon after a long journey and feel a welcoming sense of home-coming; however they may both attend the same ritual holding hands around the ruined church tower at the top of the Tor and feel moved by this; for a symbol to have meaning it does not have to be interpreted in exactly the same way by all individuals. Cohen uses the example of the C.N.D. symbol to exemplify this point. He describes how it is prominently displayed at any march and all sympathizers can associate themselves with it. However within the movement there are many diverse branches ranging from anarchists to Christians who might hold a whole variety of possibly conflicting opinions. He writes,

"They can thus provide media through which individuals can experience and express their attachment to a society without compromising their individuality. So versatile are symbols they can often be bent into these idiosyncratic shapes of meaning without such distortions becoming visible to other people who use the same symbol at the same time."¹¹

However, Cohen's notion of 'symbolic' community is limited. Despite a recognition of the individual interpretation of symbols, Cohen presents the communities under study in blanket fashion, as 'blanket communities'. He tends to imply homogeneous political and geographical political arenas with respective symbolic forms being shared throughout. By this I mean that he will use the term to refer to a whole tribe like 'the Naskapi', or to a locality like the Shetlands as 'Shetlanders'. This has dangerous implications. If you look at Glastonbury it is immediately evident that at least two completely different folk models are in operation within the same residential unit of the town. There are the

¹¹ *ibid* 9. p.18.

those of the 'locals' and those of the 'alternative community'. They have a different set of values, beliefs and life-styles - moreover they sometimes have a different set of symbols. These are two distinct communities by 'use' and cannot be placed in the same grouping except in terms of geographical area. It follows that the same can be said in respect to within the alternative community which has its inner boundaries and sub-groups.

Not only does Cohen fail to fully draw out the differing sub-groups within one geographical location, but he does not recognize community as a symbol that can be evoked in some contexts and denied in others. By and large, within the alternative community, people claim to share certain symbolic forms such as the Tor, even if they do interpret them in a diverse number of ways. However in some contexts informants actually chose to deny the presence of community or community boundaries. In some circumstances an individual might think it appropriate to talk of the 'alternative community', to evoke notions of community, and in other contexts or with other individuals they might consider it neither appropriate nor relevant. Consider the following statements.

- a) "Well, since I've lived in Glastonbury I've felt an incredible sense of warmth and trust with other people here. It's like we're all trying out different ways of being and living together, sometimes it goes wrong and we feel bitter, but mostly I feel surrounded by more laughter and love than I have ever felt before. I suppose it comes from being in a community."
- b) "Glastonbury is like a meeting place, a gathering of people to discuss ideas, it has no productive centre. We have common

agreements but we're not really working together. Community means relating to each other as people rather than roles, we are too fragmented for that. Glastonbury yearns for community."

Here we have two contrasting views of 'community' in Glastonbury; in the first the informant feels a notion of community very strongly using phrases such as 'warmth' 'trust', 'living together', and in the second the informant is more questioning and uses words like 'fragmented', 'yearns for community'. Furthermore, the informant actually states that 'community' does not exist in Glastonbury. If we look at the context behind these two statements we can understand why they are articulating such differing views. The first statement was made by a woman who was organising a community event and was closely involved with the 'community newspaper' that was produced bi-monthly. Not only were these her genuine experiences of Glastonbury but the building of the notion of 'community' was in her interests. The second statement was made by a man who worked in the area as a therapist. He came from an academic background and part of the reasons he gives for living in Glastonbury were the large number of people who were interested in his kind of therapy who are living in the area. In the context of our conversation, a notion of community in Glastonbury was unimportant. For these two individuals, their perception of, not to mention their role in the community, was quite different. Thus their notions and 'use' of community was also quite different.

Boundaries and sub-groups

Read through any New Age journal, attend any lecture or workshop, and on the face of it we appear to live in a boundary free

world. However, a closer glance and this is evidently not the whole story. In this section I wish to look at the evoked 'ideology' of a boundary free world, and then identify some of the boundaries which I believe actually prevail; looking firstly at boundaries between the 'alternative community' and the town, and secondly between groups within the alternative community. Unfortunately, within the bounds of this thesis it is not possible to continue with an analysis of Cohen's 'symbolic community' in this section. However, this section does serve to highlight the points made above.

i] A 'Boundary Free World'.

"We stand on a threshold where human consciousness can take a quantum leap out of self-consciousness into all-consciousness, God-consciousness."¹²

Central to New Age ideology, articulated above by Sir George Trevelyan, is the concept of a common and divine consciousness, shared not only by all human beings but also by all animate objects including plants and animals. Likewise, the adaptation in this ideology of James Lovelock's scientific 'Gaia' theory holds that all living things are interconnected as one big micro-organism, and places great emphasis upon the communality between nature, man and the world. Sir George Trevelyan writes of 'our relationship to the wholeness of life and the fact that the universe is a vast living organism'¹³ In one meditation group I attended, the leader drew our minds to imagine two 'dragon lines' of energy spanning the circumference of the earth, pulsating as they did so. Our

¹² 'Trailing Clouds of Glory', Jeremy Slacombe. From 'Summons To A High Crusade'. The Findhorn Press, Forres. 1986. p.15.

¹³ "The Vision of Wholeness", p.41. *ibid* 12.

minds were drawn to seeing the earth as a whole with points of concentration of energy called 'global chakras'; Glastonbury is the heart chakra. There were four monetary chakras - London, Tokyo, New York and Darjeeling - although the leader of the meditation added that Darjeeling has not been fully realized yet. In the meditation we were asked to imagine that we were a blue disc travelling from chakra to chakra in 'love, light and peace', and we were to visualize each place on a pure bed of crystal. In such a meditation the symbolism of a holistic vision is clear; the different parts of the world can be travelled over and linked without boundaries or divisions. However, within this meditation group a subtle form of boundary maintenance was prevailing all the same; at the end of the session, which had involved six of us in a small room sitting cross-legged in a circle, a woman commented that she had felt a cold energy next to her, almost as if it were coming out from the radiator but not quite. I turned my head to look for the radiator in the room, and with a start, realized it was next to my shoulder. The woman continued to say that during the meditation she had challenged the 'energy' a number of times but that it had not gone away, in fact it had warmed up a number of times. I felt this was perhaps directed at my presence in such a small group but did not say anything at the time. I believe my suspicions were more or less confirmed when the leader of the meditation approached me a few days later and said that she hoped my identification as a cold spirit would not stop me coming to the group again. In a meditation about going 'beyond' boundaries and barriers, this seemed an interesting form of 'boundary awareness'.

The population of the alternative community in Glastonbury is made up from many different nationalities and backgrounds; in addition to British people there are in particular a lot of Germans, Dutch and Americans. With such a diverse population, emphasis is placed upon the

individual rather than the culture, class or occupation. The theme of 'One Earth' was a popular one for events as well as meditations. In October 1990, the Bahai bookshop displayed a banner proclaiming 'One World' week. The week long 'Earthweek' celebrations in April 1990 put on a series of lectures, therapies, meditations, music events and a street market all to promote the awareness of the earth as an interconnected holistic entity; in its publicity it used the 'one earth' symbol of the earth photographed from space. The organizers, reputedly acting upon a message received in meditation from Gandhi, felt the event could specifically bridge the gap between the environmental 'green' movement and the 'New Age', as well as between the town and the alternative community.

The term 'global citizen' is often bandied around to be consistent with the emphasis upon an 'awareness' of ourselves as humans responsible for the planet. The revolutions in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 were welcomed in Glastonbury with great fervour, being seen as a sign of global boundaries breaking down and people interacting across cultural boundaries. A local theatre company put on a play about a man who wanted to become free and cross nation's boundaries by flying, which they took to an Eastern European country on tour. The idea of a common humanity is everywhere.

ii] The alternative community and the locality.

From the ideology of a boundary free world, let us turn and look at some of the attitudes, and conceptions of 'the other' that both the 'alternative community' and the town have formed about each other.

In the early to mid-1980's this division was commonly referred to in Glastonbury as the 'Glastafarians', the alternative incomers, versus the

'Glastonians', the locals. These were the names used by the alternative community. Here we have an example of people clearly defining themselves in opposition to the other, with obviously contrasting terms. The townspeople and those from the surrounding area tend to refer to the incomers as the 'hippies'. This term, however, is broad and leads to some confusion since it has also become a common nationwide media term to refer to the growing 'travelling community', sometimes also known as the 'New Age hippies'. However local people do tend to distinguish between the two groups; the settled alternative community are basically seen as what a taxi-driver near Findhorn (a large New Age community in Northern Scotland) referred to as 'wee wierdies', but harmless, whereas the travellers are seen as a definite threat. In speech local people will use some kind of qualifier to make clear to what group they are referring.

Even to the 'untrained' eye, the appearance of a 'New Ager' in contrast to a townspeople is immediately obvious. This excludes, of course, the small percentage of New Agers in Glastonbury who put on a suit in the morning and go to white-collar jobs in mainstream society. In effect they see themselves as temporarily putting on the 'uniform' of the 'straight' world. The members of the alternative community, however, in the main, stand out with the symbols of dress that serve to express 'belonging'; silver or beaded earrings for both men and women, usually a handknit jumper of a primary colour or muted 'earthy' shade, natural fibres and either strong outdoor shoes or sandals; a peace sign, yin-yang sign or rainbow displayed on some part of the clothing is common.

An interesting division between the alternative community and the townspeople is clear in their attitudes towards the use of social drugs. While tea, coffee, sugar, cigarettes and alcohol are the accepted and commonly used drugs of mainstream society in Britain, the alternative

community have challenged mainstream social and legal convention about drug usage. Tea and coffee are not universally acceptable; many people will drink only herbal tea. Many are teetotal and sugar is avoided. In addition, homeopathic cures are preferred to antibiotics. However, in contrast, cannabis is widely smoked socially, and although many people these days object to taking 'chemical drugs', a large number claim that their original insights into the spiritual nature of the world stem from their experiences of taking acid or other hallucinogenics. As such, the alternative community have challenged the social rules in British society of what constitutes a drug and the 'acceptable' norms of drug consumption in social interaction. In doing so, New Age society sets up a clear and distinctive boundary between themselves and wider society regarding social interaction.

The relationship between the 'alternative community' and the town has a history of difficulties which inform and influence present day interaction. When I was growing up in the area of Glastonbury in the 1970's I remember groups of the alternative community camped upon a piece of common ground and local people reacting very defensively. Rumours and reports of nudity, and even witchcraft, were rife. Cafes in Glastonbury hung signs in their windows saying 'No hippies here'. Any friction there was has been heightened by the Glastonbury Festival, a pop festival which is held in the nearby village of Pilton. It has now grown into an international event and continues as a source of immense local controversy. In the 1970's it was smaller but even then attracted a large crowd of 'alternatively dressed' people to an area which, one must remember, remains politically to this day part of a Conservative constituency.

During the period of my fieldwork, the alternative community seemed more integrated in the local area than I remembered from my

childhood days, or even than during my pilot fieldwork study of 1987. Perhaps a lot of this is due to the number of alternative children attending local schools. In addition the 'alternative community' play a more active economic role in the town. Rather than being appended largely as an unskilled temporary labour they have developed a degree of local economic control by starting small businesses and taking over more and more of the High Street shops. Some of these shops are limited to an alternative and possibly tourist clientele, but others such as the photocopiers, the health food shop and some of the cafes are used by a wide variety of people. From a formerly marginal position, the alternative run shops are now responsible for capturing a lot of the trade in the town.

However, in addition, a self-conscious effort is being made by some members of the 'alternative community' to narrow the gap of communication between the two groups. Such efforts are part of an on-going process, but from the viewpoint of the anthropologist they often served to highlight the differences and divisions between the two groups. An example of such an effort arose in an event put on in the spring of 1989 called 'Earthweek'. 'Earthweek' comprised of a series of workshops, concerts and lectures. Tents and tipis were put up in the Abbey playing fields to demonstrate ways of living 'closer to nature', talks were given about conservation, and there were a variety of activities for children including face painting. The aim behind the week long event was to bring together the New Age and ecological movement, but also to have a week of environmental awareness in the town which would be open and accessible to all, and bring together different segments of the population. However the event was only publicized- and publicized very little to my knowledge- in New Age and alternative journals. When the High Street was closed for a day of celebration, one local newsagent became very

angry because he said he had not even been warned about this in advance, and had lost much of his custom. Afterwards it was described by a local councillor, Councillor Andrews, as comprising 'the great unwashed and professional beggars.' In contrast, Elana, who organized the event, wrote in the Mid-Somerset Gazette ,

"Local people came and thanked us for such a lovely time and how nice it was to have our street closed! No one complained to us, no one commented on begging or dirty people;"

(May 24th 1990)

Thus an attempt by the alternative community to break down boundaries and hold an event with the 'town' left local people feeling unconsulted, uninvolved and alienated. Other events such as the annual Dance Festival where the High Street is closed for a night of dancing has proved to be more successful in integrating social groups.

In general the two groups, the 'alternative community' and the 'locals' largely view each other with mistrust. The newspaper I helped with, 'Glastonbury Times', was described as a newspaper for the whole town, presenting local news from an alternative point of view. Although a few 'locals' read it, generally members of the alternative community form both the contributors and readers.

I found myself in an interesting position because I was involved with the alternative community and yet had also been brought up just outside Glastonbury. Thus I was a local and a Glastafarian - and an anthropologist to boot! Being between all positions I was able to observe how quick the alternative community were to dismiss the views of people from outside, largely as 'old order'. On the other hand when local people saw me as part of the 'alternative community', particularly when I was researching articles for the newspaper, I was often treated very rudely and dismissively.

iii] Groups within the 'alternative community'.

Needless to say, the category 'alternative community', does not represent a homogeneous group. Using the example of Star Trek, whilst the crew of the Starship Enterprise might appear a homogeneous group from a neighbouring spaceship, all viewers know that once inside one finds that Scottie and Spock come from radically different backgrounds. Moreover, different affiliations and relationships exist within the Spaceship.

Given the general New Age ideology of tolerance one group will tend not to outwardly criticize another, but present the 'alternative community' as a unified community. However as soon as informants saw me as integrated into one group or another, or just felt comfortable with me, divisions would come out in conversation. Gossip and knowledge of other people's affairs is widespread.

As I mentioned in chapter one, affiliations and thus, sub-groups, within the alternative community, are shifting. Moreover, individuals move from one sub-group to another in different contexts. For example, a person who earns their living as an acupuncturist might spend a lot of their day-time hours based around the healing wing of The Glastonbury Experience. They would perhaps eat lunch with other healers. However they live in a caravan which is parked up in the grounds of a large house in an outlying village with a group of travellers. Thus they move from the sub-group of healers to that of travellers in the course of their daily interaction- on the face of it, quite a social distance.

If it is true, as observed, that the members of sub-groups are shifting, it is perhaps most satisfactory to identify or classify the groups on the basis of the common bond or lynch-pin, which forms the group; in

New Age terminology, why these people 'connect up'. As I mentioned in the Introduction, many people form groups on the basis of sharing a method of therapy or spiritual practice. For example, people who attended a 'rebirthing group' would commonly spend time with others who had undergone rebirthing. Another group had met by all being 'premies', or devotees, of Guru Maradji. Groups formed around centres where particular teachers were based. In such circumstances it was not uncommon for notions of 'family' to be evoked to enhance the solidarity of the group.

The identification of sub-groups can also be drawn up around the two social focal points of the Assembly Rooms and Glastonbury Experience. The Assembly Rooms attracts a wide range of people, including travellers, a theatre group who are based there, and an older more prosperous group with financial investment in the building who are anxious to maintain it as a 'community centre'. As the cafe which is part of the Assembly Rooms complex, is set back from the road, often with travellers' dogs tethered up outside, it rarely attracts the wandering tourist or towns person, so the building is populated almost exclusively by the alternative community. In contrast to the neighbouring 'Glastonbury Experience', the Assembly Rooms can be seen as closer to the 'mainstream'; coffee is available, people smoke cigarettes and are likely to pop out for a quick pint of beer at lunch-time. In 'The Glastonbury Experience' the prevailing ethos is upon 'purity' of life; there is a vegan restaurant and wholefood shop which sells 'pure' and 'natural' foods. Aromatic smoke is more likely to come billowing from the incense shop than a neighbour's joint.

The relationship between the 'New Age travellers' and the settled New Age community is interesting. Although the two are radically different, particularly in regard to the wandering lifestyle of the

travellers, they hold sufficiently similar values to be part of a broad definition of the New Age. Such similar characteristics are their ethos of individualism, rejection of consumer materialism, movement towards living on the land, non-monetary economy, spiritual values and search for an alternative way of living, as well as clusterings around places such as Glastonbury and other 'sacred sites'. Travellers whom I met stressed their sense of individualism, to the point where they felt they could not speak for any other traveller or present themselves as a unified group. To a certain extent, my observations confirmed this: travellers ranged from people living in vehicles or camping in quiet rural places to young people from urban areas nicknamed the "Brew Crew" on account of their liking for cans of Special Brew. They often have dreadlocked hair and uniformly wear ripped clothes; indeed, in their appearance they appear a highly homogeneous group. Yet every living thing is seen by them as a free and independent being. When challenged about their dog running wild in a village nearby to Glastonbury, one man replied 'it's a free dog'.

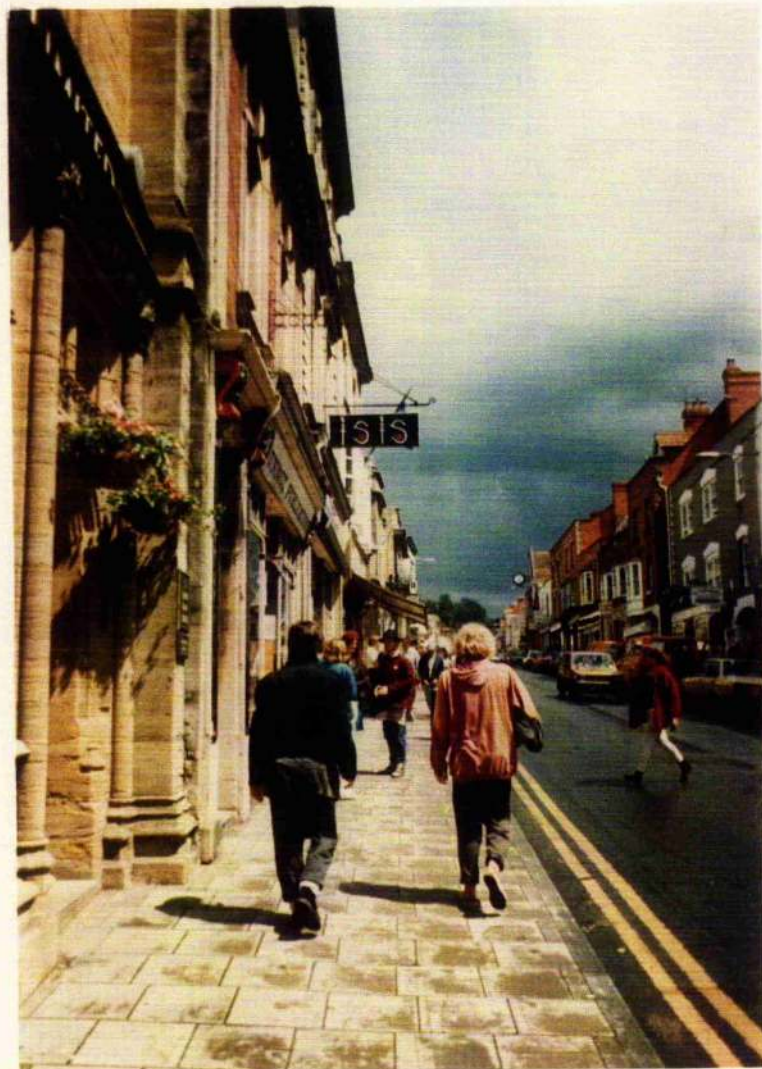
With strong similarities in their values it is interesting to look at how the settled 'alternative community' interact with the fluid traveller population which clusters around Glastonbury, particularly during summer time. Some members of the alternative community were very supportive of the traveller population; indeed, some people had lived as travellers before settling in Glastonbury. People with land would often let them stay on it, and a separate and free area was created for them at the Glastonbury C.N.D. festival. However the travellers are very unpopular with 'locals' in Glastonbury, and have a bad media image nationally. When travellers cause problems in the town, this backfires upon the alternative community as a whole and people's attitudes become mixed. When the police were called to move on a crowd of drunken travellers in

the High Street, one person commented "Sometimes I think the travellers and the police deserve each other."

Thus there is a feeling of protectiveness towards the travellers in their dealings with the institutions of British society, but also a feeling of separateness in lifestyle and belief system. Many people from the settled alternative community have ambivalent feelings about the travellers.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to place the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury in its 'locality'; it does not exist in isolation as a contained group, socially or geographically, but rather in the midst of a populated market town in England. Its boundaries are not, and cannot, be closed; a continual osmosis occurs between the two groups through recruitment, trade, ideas and communication. At the same time definite boundaries are maintained; the 'alternative community' and the locals view each other as being in contrast.



Chapter Three

Individualism and Health

Health and British Society

Attitudes towards health in British, and Western society at large, are in the process of change and have been for the last decade or so; such change is largely constituted by a return to the recognition of the connection between body and mind as mutually influential. As Robin Horton describes it, contrasting 'African traditional thought' with 'Western science', the germ theory was hailed with such open arms by scientists, that the social/mental causes of disease were pushed aside for many years,

"Modern Western medical scientists have long been distracted from noting the causal connexion between social disturbance and disease by the success of the germ theory. It would seem, indeed, that a conjunction of the germ theory, of the discovery of potent antibiotics and immunization techniques, and of conditions militating against the build-up of natural resistance to many killer infections, for long made it very difficult for scientists to see the importance of this connexion."¹

It becomes more and more common to see on the chemist's shelf herbal medicines for minor ailments, and a wider and wider group of people using them. From natural child-birth techniques, concern over 'E' numbers and preservatives, yoga classes, herbal throat pastilles, to meditation and massage, so-called natural methods of healing are

¹ 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', Robin Horton. Wilson 1974.

becoming increasingly accepted. According to Rosalind Coward², a recent survey revealed that between 1984 and 1987, 34% of the population tried an 'alternative' therapy. An integral part of such 'alternative therapies' is the close connection between mind and body as mutually influential, indeed inseparable. In the New Age movement this is often referred to as the 'holistic vision of self', a notion of holism within each individual. But where such therapies and approaches to health are just beginning to gain acceptance in mainstream British society, they constitute the 'norms' in Glastonbury and the New Age movement in general.

I argue that it is in this changed perception of the body, one that gives a primary concern to health and well-being based upon the mind-body connection, that an individualist ethos is revealed. As Rosalind Coward writes,

"Alternative therapies talk of a 'new age', an age where the individual is no longer part of a system or bureaucracy but is recognized in her or his full individuality. And frequently this new attention to the individual is represented as an attention to things 'spiritual'."³

In this section I intend to begin by giving an overall picture of attitudes to the body, health and healing in Glastonbury; then proceed to examine in greater detail through case studies and analysis of literature the connection between mind and body, and lastly look at a posed extreme extension of this philosophy in relation to physical immortality. Much discussion of health, the body and healing in New Age language

² 'The Whole Truth- The Myth of Alternative Health', Rosalind Coward. 1989. Faber, London.

³ *ibid* 2, p.11.

revolves around notions of 'spirituality' and 'energy'. I discuss both these terms in some depth in my chapter on spirituality, but so central are they to health, and indeed all aspects of living in Glastonbury, that I feel it necessary to briefly explore them here. 'Spirituality' is often used by New Agers to refer to non-institutionalized religion. Moreover it is used in this context to refer to a non-material aspect of any activity. Thus, in relation to the body, spirituality refers to an individual's awareness of her/his body that is not purely physical. 'Energy' is a term used in many different contexts in New Age circles; for example, it can be used to describe an atmosphere in a room, a painting or the interaction between two people. Simply, it refers to the level of activity. However the meaning of the term is extended to describe the animating force in individuals, plants or the planet Earth. Such an animating force is given sacred properties.

Health in Glastonbury

Glastonbury is considered by many people in the New Age movement and Christian church alike as a place of pilgrimage and healing; a lot of people are attracted to the town and surrounding area for this very reason.

'Healing', an ambiguous term, refers to mind, body and spirit; practitioners of the many forms of healing are called 'healers'. As the 'heart chakra'⁴ of the planet, on a powerful ley line of energy and with the Tor and the Chalice Well and spring in its midst, many informants said they had moved to the area because Glastonbury had a very strong and powerful energy which can be drawn on for healing purposes. One of the more light-hearted banters between local 'Glastonians' as they discuss

⁴ 'chakras' are seven points of energy in the body, according to Indian Vedic philosophy

the alternative community is "I've lived here all my life, what I want to know is, why haven't I felt the vibes?"

Although there has been a burgeoning of 'healers' and 'healing' in Glastonbury over the last twenty years, culminating in the last five, healing in Glastonbury has historical roots and tradition. At the foot of the Tor is Chalice Well, a twelfth century well fed by a spring coming out of the hillside. Many myths and legends are associated with the well, no doubt heightened by the dramatic red colouring of the water. It's healing reputation can be traced back as far as 1582 when Dr John Dee, the astrologer and mathematician declared himself possessed of the 'elixir vitae' he had found in Glastonbury. When the Pump Room in Bath reached the height of its popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century, Glastonbury was a nearby further attraction.⁵ Since 1958 the Chalice Well has been a charitable trust preserving the spring and developing a garden and meditative space around it where visitors can come in for a small price to drink the waters and sit in the gardens.

At the end of the 1980's, Glastonbury has become a centre for 'alternative healing', as has Totnes in Devon. As more healers are attracted to the area and its reputation grows, so more people visit and/or move to the area for its healing powers; so, even more healers arrive. In addition some people who have undergone healing themselves train to become healers. It is, after all, a way of earning a living in a 'spiritually attuned' manner. In an ironic and comically intended article in the 'Glastonbury Times', the alternative newspaper I helped with, a resident of Glastonbury comments upon the numbers of healers,

"Following scenes involving over-committed healers chasing Glastonbury's last remaining sick person down the High Street, the

⁵ Information sheet, Chalice Well, Chilkwell St, Glastonbury.

Equal Opportunities Board has come to an agreement with the many Health Professionals. In future half the town must be sick between January 1st and June 30th. A mass healing will occur on July 1st. Then the other half will become sick.[Self-healing is abolished as an employment measure]⁶

In addition to the Natural Health Clinic which has been set up with the more 'traditional' methods such as acupuncture, herbalism, massage, reflexology and homeopathy is G.A.I.A. 'Glastonbury Advice and Information Agency' is an information centre set up in the Healing Wing of the Glastonbury Experience, aiming to put people in contact with the different healers and therapists. These people offer a wide range of healing techniques including therapeutic counselling, Shiatsu, Reiki healing, yoga, rebirthing, regression therapy, meditation, astrology and astrological counselling to name but a few. They also arrange events, concerts and workshops.

Physical health, healing and well-being are essential in the alternative community's holistic vision of the self and to the personal transformation process which membership in the community implies. As one might expect daily diet is thus seen as very important; a 'you are what you eat' ethos prevails. For reasons of both environmental ethics and health, many people are vegetarians, and indeed, Glastonbury hosts one of Britain's few vegan restaurants. The wholefood shop even includes a section for macrobiotic vegetarians who try to balance the yin-yang elements of their diet. The house where I lived was also vegan and for retreats and catering days there we would provide vegan food. One informant who was a vegan and ate a diet largely consisting of raw foods, said she was bringing up her two children as vegans because she felt it

⁶ 'Column 23', Dominic, 'Glastonbury Times', Autumn 1990, p.23.

was spiritually beneficial to eat only of the earth in order to become pure. However, consistent with the diversity of thought in Glastonbury, others ate a wide variety of food including animal meat. In one conversation with a rather defensive group of meat-eaters complaining about 'born-again vegetarians', they agreed that it was not so much what you ate, but that you appreciated and gave thanks for the life-force that had been sacrificed. The uniting factor behind these seemingly disparate views is concern over the way in which food is produced; for example using organically grown produce wherever possible, and a recognition of food as having a strong influence upon the individual at all levels.

As diet in general is seen as very important, so are specific diets to cleanse, purify and/or heighten spiritual experience. In the period leading up to the Harmonic Convergence in 1987, some participants went on a fruit and nut diet to prepare their bodies. Another informant fasted for two days before his wedding. Fasts and diets are common leading up to significant dates in the year, such as astrological dates or festivals such as the Solstices, Beltane or the Equinox. Food is seen as integrally connected with spirituality. 'The Rainbow Diet' is designed specifically to heighten and enhance the spiritual experience. Sprouted beans, nuts and fresh foods are the basic constituent of the diet, for they contain the most 'chi' or life-force. Some people make such diets part of their regular nutrition. The only liquid one woman I met would drink was water from the spring at the Chalice Well. She drove around with gallon containers of it weighting down the back of her estate car. Another informant who had a history of gastric problems connected, he said, with stress and emotional problems, would fast for two days a week and spend another day eating only raw fruit and fruit juices. He felt food was a particularly sensitive issue. One day when a heated discussion had been going on around him, he later told me that his whole body had been in such a state

of shock from the aggressive energy around him, that he had had terrible indigestion. Again we see the close connection between mind and body as part of the 'holistic and integrated process', relating to the individual human being.

Mind/Body & Individualism

At this point it may well be asked, what is the connection between mind/body and individualism anyway? I now wish to discuss this question and link it to an examination in greater detail of selected case studies and literature, for it is central to attitudes to health in Glastonbury. An individualist ethos is one which great emphasis, and awareness, is placed upon the self, and self-responsibility. In the mind/body approaches of alternative medicine, and general conception of the body in Glastonbury, the boundaries between physical health and spiritual/emotional/mental health are lowered. Thus health is something which is integrally connected with the self, it becomes something the individual is personally responsible for. As Rosalind Coward writes,

"It is the state of the whole person, the spirit or personality which predisposes an individual towards illness. But the differences between earlier 'spiritual' accounts of illness and contemporary accounts based on the idea of personality is that the individual is much more directly and personally responsible for illness."⁷

Rosalind Coward develops this thesis one step further. In her book, 'The Whole Truth', a controversial critique of the alternative health movement, she links the emphasis upon 'the spiritual' in a person as influential in illness, with an underlying emphasis upon personality,

⁷ *ibid* 2. Coward. p.77.

"There is an extremely hazy area between spirit and personality in reference to the whole person... for although in the past, connections were made between illness and the spiritual state of an individual, there has never before been a theory which connects illness with the state of the personality. The connection between illness and personality gives an individual an even greater responsibility for his or her illness than previous 'religious' explanations of illness as expressions of God's displeasure."

A personal example during fieldwork exemplifies this point further. Towards the end of the summer I developed a virus which came and went over a period of a month and left me feeling faint and nauseous. Although I went to my own doctor, [National Health Service] she said that there was very little she or I could do except look after myself and wait until it left my system. At the same time I was helping with the alternative newspaper in the town. My relations with the woman running it were deteriorating, the newspaper seemed to be going through a period of unpopularity and there were few helpers to put together the autumn issue. When I became sick I phoned up and said I would have to stay at home for the day. Aware of the pressures of getting the newspaper ready to go to print, I returned the next day, not feeling completely better. After a few hours I began to feel physically very drained and decided to go home again. The woman said to me,

"I'm rarely ill, perhaps the odd cold but that's all. It's because I let my emotions in and out freely, when I'm angry I scream and so I don't get any blockages. The reason why you are ill is because you suppress things. This is your chance now you are here in Glastonbury to let go. You are trying to hold down a job and career,

have a monogamous relationship, trying to please others. Now you are in Glastonbury you have a chance to throw it all off and to really experience yourself. All the resentment and frustration you have is manifesting itself on a physical level."

Not only did I end up feeling twice as miserable about feeling ill, but I also came to feel personally responsible for my illness; it was something inextricably linked with my personality. Thus I also became responsible for regaining my health. It was only when I could return to my own value system and see it all as at least partially physical, like a car running low on oil, and thus beyond my mental control, that I could relax and in turn got better.

Thus individualism and attitudes to health in the alternative community in Glastonbury, are connected in two ways; firstly, with the overall concern with the self, and secondly with the self as influential on and responsible for, physical health. I now intend to look at one aspect of mind/body healing which has reached great popularity and acceptance both in the alternative community and to a degree in wider society.

i] Spiritual Healing

There is nothing new in spiritual healing; known widely in society and with greater and lesser degrees of acceptance, its roots can be traced back to the New Testament. The question may be legitimately posed where its place lies in a discussion of New Age beliefs. Indeed many of the practices such as herbalism and acupuncture which are described here as 'New Age' originated in other centuries, cultures and traditions. However it is highly characteristic of the New Age movement to borrow from other traditions in such a way. In this specific example I am examining spiritual healing within the context of the alternative community in Glastonbury;

there is a large spiritual healing centre in Glastonbury, and I am concerned with those people who are involved with it as part of a larger network of New Age beliefs.

On a weekly basis, a meditation and healing workshop meets in Glastonbury, led by two healers belonging to the National Federation of Spiritual Healers. This group has been meeting one evening a week for the last three years, with a steadily growing and supportive attendance. When I arrived in Glastonbury in October 1989 I started to attend the meetings and each week there were about thirty to fifty people, all crowded into a relatively small room, many of whom had travelled from up to a twenty mile radius to attend the meeting. At Easter 1990, the leaders opened a permanent site at the bottom of the High Street. An opening event with many speakers and workshops was held to celebrate the opening of the 'Glastonbury Healing Centre'. As one of the few alternative shops/ centres at the far bottom end of the High Street, people commented on how wonderful it was to spread the 'healing energy' to the bottom end of the town.

Spiritual healing was explained to me as the transference of healing energy from the healer to the patient. One informant who was receiving spiritual healing for a physical complaint said it made her feel very deeply relaxed like a meditation, even to the point where afterwards she found it quite difficult to walk or talk. The most technical description I have ever been given is that when the brain rests the nerve cells vibrate in different ways and different directions. However when one concentrates upon one thing they all start to vibrate in the same direction. Flares of energy build up around the area needing healing. This resonates a harmonious exchange of energy between the healer and the person being healed. When I attended a workshop on self-healing led by Audrey Muir- Copland, she said personal crises were often linked to an

old misery that is difficult to let go. If there was a resistance in the mind to going forward in life there would probably also be a resistance in the body which she referred to as 'biofeedback'. Often healers find a concurrence between the two; for example, problems with feet or walking could suggest a problem with moving forward mentally or emotionally; problems with the shoulders or back could be linked to taking on too much responsibility. She explained that one has to find a way of releasing this negative energy.

As I have mentioned, spiritual healing, and indeed body/mind and natural healing are not products of the 1980's. Indeed spiritual healing witnessed a great resurgence at the end of the last century as the Christian Science movement burgeoned in North America, and quickly became an international movement. I believe an interesting, if spurious, comparison can be made between the two; one at the beginning of the era of industrialism and the other at the end. In early industrializing Boston many people were in a new urban environment surrounded by others from different countries, religions and social systems; the familiar traditions and structures were not there to fall back upon. A similarly individualistic period, people looked around for new belief systems which were relevant to their new lives. At the end of the 1980's the patterns are again changing, for example traditional social forms of marriage and family do not seem appropriate to many. However, relating to the point raised by Rosalind Coward I mentioned earlier, the two movements go their separate ways with the ultimate responsibility lying with God in the Christian Science movement and with the individual personality in contemporary 'alternative' movements.

ii] Literature on healing

Within Glastonbury a wide range of healing techniques are available, ranging from spiritual healing to personal consultations with channelled disembodied spirits. Because of the small or non-existent distinction between body and mind, and because the healing process is so central to the process of personal transformation at the heart of New Age thought, members of the alternative community try a wide range of methods, and a wide range of healers travel to Glastonbury from all over the world. The following three examples are taken from publications widely read within the alternative community. Although it perhaps defies convention in participant observation to bring in written sources, the social group in question are highly literate and so the written word is an integral part of their world. For this reason I feel justified in using articles from magazines as examples. With their emphasis upon different mediums they can be said to be representative of the range of healing practices in Glastonbury.

In the Spring 1990 edition of 'Kindred Spirit', one of the leading articles is about the healing power of massage, as an agent in relaxing the body so that healing can occur. However it is also seen as a catalyst for much more than this,

"it is often through receiving a massage that people first begin their journey of self-discovery and exploration of the integral link of the body, mind and spirit - the holistic principle. The body has a precious innocence to it and seems less devious than the mind."⁸

Through touch, the article continues, it is possible to get in contact with the body, with the emotions and memories of our past which are locked up in our physical self,

"For the body is never separate from the thoughts and feelings,

⁸ 'A Language of Love', Nitya Lacroix. Kindred Spirit, Spring 1990. Totnes. p.41.

the childhood influences and attitudes, the personality that builds up around one's emotional experiences, or the posture and physical structure one forms to create an image in which to function. The body reveals one's personal life history, and stored within the muscles and tissues are memories of all that has happened to make us happy and sad, fearful and hopeful, and a whole human being."⁹

The second example I give relates to sound. In 'Global Link-Up'¹⁰ there is a section called 'The Power of Sound' and has articles by two healers who run classes and workshops on the subject of sound in healing and transformation. Jill Purse, the first of the two, believes in the West we have lost our voice and become 'sound-polluters'. She sees sound as powerful on two levels; firstly as a means to keep the body healthy, and secondly as a means of keeping in tune with others,

"When traditional societies chant together, first and foremost it is like sonorous yoga, to resonate the body so that it is healthy and to resonate with yourself and with those closest to you.

In church for example you might sit in the family pew and literally come into resonance with your family and all the people that are in the church. Many churches are situated on very ancient sacred places where there is a kind of meditation between heaven and earth"

My third example is that of 'colour therapy'. In colour therapy the patient is healed by absorbing different colour rays. Different colours are appropriate for different conditions. For example, pink rays are good for people with addiction problems, and for relaxation and letting go of

⁹ *ibid* 8.

¹⁰ 'The Power of Sound', Jill Purse. 'Global Link-Up', Gloucester. April/May 1991.p.12

stress. Orange is good for hyperactive children and blue is known as a colour for healing. Marie Louise Lacy writes,

"It's not by chance that blue jeans were introduced and are worn round the world for any occasion. Everything that happens is trying to link us to a deeper purpose for being here and for us to look at that. The colour blue is linked to faith and trust, integrity and loyalty, all the attributes we need today, and helps us find the purpose for incarnating at this time."¹¹

In these three examples of healing, I have tried to show how a wide variety of healing techniques are used; the examples given are all through the senses but many other forms exist. What links colour therapy to homeopathy to spiritual healing is an overwhelming belief in the integral connection between mind and body.

Physical Immortality- a logical extension?

A logical, if extreme, extension of the mind/body connection perhaps lies in physical immortality. Physical immortalism is the belief in being able to avoid death; an individual may consciously decide to stay in their own physical bodies, and even to slow the external ageing process. These ideas have gained popularity within elements of the New Age movement,

"We are at the end of the old Aeon and at the dawn of the New. At every such major planetary change, all ideas undergo revaluation. Many conventions are overthrown, certain old ideas become useless, and new ideas suddenly become useful.

¹¹ 'Colour for Healing and Harmony', Marie Louise Lacy. Kindred Spirit, Totnes. vol.1 no.10.p.26.

Physical immortality is the most useful new - yet extremely ancient - idea now available as we enter the New Aquarian Aeon." ¹²

Physical Immortalists believe that if an individual truly accepts their responsibility for life in the world and affirms that they truly love their life, they will be able to maintain their individual physical bodies. People who die are those who have 'deathist' urges; negative attitudes towards life, which in turn, lead eventually to physical decay.,

"There are no dualisms in Immortal Thought.

There is always a movement towards synthesis and alchemical Union. As William Blake once said: *The body and the Spirit are One, not two. They are literally the same thing.* All conceptions of separate bodies - physical, etheric, astral, spiritual - are harmonized and united as One Purified and uplifted incorruptible Body in Service to the Divine and in support of Life on this Earth and throughout the Universe."¹³

Although physical immortalism is one spike on the umbrella of New Age philosophy, it cannot be pointed to as an universally accepted belief in Glastonbury; excepting, naturally, its adherents, the ideas are often greeted with scepticism. Many others, indeed, are striving towards the opposite goal; to develop a loving acceptance of death within themselves. Reincarnation, with its opportunities for past and future lives, was a common subject of conversation. In a conversation with one informant who ran retreats on death and bereavement, he said he felt people who became physical immortalists were perhaps people who were

¹² 'Physical Immortality: History, Theory & Techniques', Robert Coon. The Omega Point Foundation, Glastonbury. 1989. p.1.

¹³ *ibid* 12 .p.14-15

very concerned with, and perhaps afraid of, death itself. He felt this was shown by the way in which they placed so much emphasis upon death and had built up a whole philosophy around avoiding it. But, he added that he felt it was a very interesting philosophy, because it challenged people's preconceptions about death.

So what element of New Age thinking does embrace this belief? On an international basis it can be traced to the 'Rebirthing Movement', led by Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray. Originating in America, this practice/therapy/philosophy of life, which I describe in the chapter 'Spirituality', has become very popular. It rests very much upon self-responsibility, making affirmations in one's life and realizing them. Their adoption of the ideas of physical immortality has served to legitimate what otherwise could be seen as a fringe idea. When Leonard Orr visited Glastonbury, I attended a question and answer evening with him where the subject of physical immortality inevitably arose. He said to become physically immortal was to reach a certain level of spiritual awareness and consciousness - "to stay alive is to be one with God." The death urge he believes is what keeps people from being fully alive, that senility is a childish way of gaining attention; he mentioned that when he was 'back-peddalling spiritually' he had suffered from senility for two years. When someone asked him if death was not part of the natural cycle, he answered, quoting the Bible, that death is the wages of sin and that people re-incarnate to pay for their sins. He concluded, with a mischievous grin and twinkling eyes, "Staying immortal is the trip".

Thus, the Rebirthing movement, which has gained great popularity in America and Europe, by supporting the theory of physical immortality recently, has given it credence and a greater degree of acceptability when it otherwise might have remained quite marginal in Glastonbury. As it happens one of the major teachers of physical immortality lives in

Glastonbury and over many conversations we discussed his ideas surrounding the subject. His wife is also a physical immortalist and I believe for a period of time a group would meet on a weekly basis. He has also written booklets on the subject and so my interpretation of his ideas comes from a mixture of written material, conversations and workshops attended. Much of his readership and popularity actually comes from outside of Glastonbury. In a manner similar to Leonard Orr citing the Bible, our informant traces physical immortality in the doctrines of most major world religions including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Hinduism, Shinto Religion and even Arthurian myth. He explains the process of developing physical immortality in technical terms,

"It is possible to make a transformational shift of bodily structure and energy to both higher and lower frequencies. As wavelength patterns throughout the living form shorten and increase vibratory frequencies, the individual reaches a level above entropy and decay. At this point, an observer may think that the Immortal has dematerialized because he or she is no longer visible. This is not accurate. 'Bodily Translation' is a more descriptive term. The immortal body maintains its essential structure as it subtly shifts in and out of the visible spectrum."¹⁴

According to the informant, immortals are currently in existence around the planet, but they do not make themselves manifest because they wish to be first accepted by the whole of humanity; they have in the past retreated from public consciousness because they have been rejected or not understood. It is this which is seen as the 'task' of the Aquarian Age; not only have we mortals reached a point in the development of our

¹⁴ *ibid* 12. p.26

consciousness where we are able to choose not to decay on a physical level, but it is also time for the "reintegration of ALL Immortals back into the global culture"¹⁵ . To work toward physical immortality he recommends self-examination of negative preconceptions, and particularly training the body through diet fasting and prayer.

I have chosen to focus upon the theory and practice of physical immortalism is because it exemplifies an extreme of the mind/body philosophy and individualism. To say that you can choose to stay in one physical body and not to decay is ultimate control over one's own self. Usually birth and death are the two elements of an individual's life over which they have little or no control; most world religions have developed philosophies to help people accept this. However in physical immortalism individuals take such complete responsibility for themselves, they control their own life; literally.

¹⁵ *ibid* 12. p.43

Chapter Four

Individualism and Work

Introduction

'Hands to work and hearts to God', runs an old Shaker proverb. An Utopian community which reached its height of popularity in nineteenth century North America, the Shakers extolled the application of an individual to hard work as a way to become closer to God. Their finely crafted furniture and buildings, produced at the zenith of the movement, pays tribute to this. No such maxim exists within the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury, although there are a considerable number of artists and craftspeople. Indeed, often, informants voiced feelings that one of the problems of larger British society is the overemphasis upon work, coupled with people losing their ability to play. People in the alternative community are looking for a way to earn a living within the larger capitalist framework of society in a way consistent with their beliefs. The uncomfortable tension of living 'apart' from society and yet receiving a fortnightly dole check, has pressed home and through the endeavours of different groups and individuals an economic infrastructure is evolving.

In this chapter, I begin by giving some informants' views and attitudes to work which emerged through conversations over the fieldwork period. I then proceed to introduce the idea of an 'economic infra-structure'. This notion is enunciated by the people themselves; it has distinct theoretical underpinnings and meanings, stemming particularly from the writings of E.F. Schumacher¹ which have been very influential since the 1970's. Through a series of case studies I exemplify

¹ 'Small is Beautiful. A Study of Economics As If People Mattered', E.F. Schumacher. Abacus, London. 1974.

how the embryonic economic infrastructure in the 'alternative community' is developing in a highly individualistic manner. Finally I proceed to discuss an intriguing philosophy which serves as a justification of, and legitimacy for, materialism; prosperity consciousness.

Attitudes to Work

An ethos of individualism is reflected in both people's attitudes to work, and the work they choose to do. Within Glastonbury the jobs people hold varies enormously. The need to earn a living and also live a 'spiritually attuned' lifestyle is full of contradictions and is a growing subject of discussion.

Although some people do hold full-time jobs such as teachers, office-workers or social workers, this can be seen as a reflection of the permeable boundary between the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury and larger British society, as we saw in Chapter Two. Boundaries exist between the two groups and yet there also exists a stream of people moving as if by osmosis between them. But on the whole, the more involved people are in the movement, the more they are looking to, or have established, a means of earning a living independently of the organizations and institutions of larger British society; thus a continuum evolves. For example, one informant worked as a computer programmer for a lorry distribution firm. She often felt a strong disparity between her spiritual life at home, and her life at work. She said she felt uncomfortable in her work environment. When she got a new job working for an environmentally oriented organization, she said she felt more positive and able to integrate the two. However within six months of taking the job she had given in her notice and bought a ticket to India in order to follow her spiritual quest more fully. Another woman

had trained as a teacher and worked in a comprehensive school in the Midlands. After going through a course of healing herself, she said she wanted to give up teaching to become a healer for the National Federation of Spiritual Healers. A man who worked as a chemist was at the same time training part-time to become an acupuncturist, at which point he intended to give up his chemist's job completely. In the quest for a work life consistent with an individual's 'New Age' values, people often use the term 'spiritually attuned'. In such a phrase it is apparent that people are looking for work which expresses and 'nurtures' their spiritual selves, or their 'deep self'. In such a concern for the realization of the self, we see the ethos of individualism emerging.

To some people I met, work was not important. It was seen as a means of earning a living and so people said they felt they would be happy to wash dishes or to work in a factory because it was not the focal point of their lives. But some felt that however seemingly meaningless the work was it could have something to teach them as an experience. In a conversation with one informant working in a factory he said,

"Spiritual happiness doesn't depend on your occupation, people place far too much emphasis in life on success. I feel the dependence in life upon one thing, directing your energies towards just one thing is out of accordance with nature. In fact I think that the emphasis upon goal and success are actually responsible for many of the atrocities in the world such as running roughshod over civilisations, destroying natural resources and being out of harmony with ourselves and other people. For the people of Northern Tibet they don't have this ethos and yet they lead their lives fully."

To others, the boundary between the 'alternative community' in Glastonbury and the larger society, is stronger. In their dislike and distrust of conventional job roles the contradictions between mainstream economic life and New Age beliefs, which place great emphasis upon the spiritual, is clear. The prevalent image of work is one of a nine-to-five, inflexible job structure, a high income which traps one with material possessions and a high standard of living. It is also seen as being commonly a situation where one is working for a capitalist organization, structured hierarchically and treating people as human fodder rather than an individual. Such a philosophy brings to mind Marx's theory of alienation, and yet none of my informants ever referred to Marx; this is constant with the non-political worldview the New Age movement has adopted. In Glastonbury work is seen as something totally separate from the rest of one's life. It is this image of work, and consequently of larger British society, that some informants were distrustful of. In a conversation with one informant about types of work, he commented that he would like my job because I seemed able to wander round and be able to do what I liked when I liked [projection of an aimless anthropologist!] He said,

"My problem with making a living is that I can't tie myself down, I can't take someone else dictating to me a specific two days to work. [he had recently lost a casual job] I see the work trap as illegal, it's a commitment which ties you down to all sorts of things you weren't aware of before, like getting a mortgage. If I were to set up a block of gold in the street surrounded by a fence, and once you entered that fence you were trapped there with the door closing behind you for the rest of your life, would that be legal?"

This kind of attitude both exemplifies and reproduces the boundary between the alternative community and the outer society. In creating an image of 'the other', they create an image of all the things they do not want, and thus develop a picture of themselves. 'Work' as a separate category is rejected. In an article in 'The Glastonbury Times', Ann Morgan continues this theme, yet develops it further in the direction of a positive alternative,

"The need to earn a 'living' has become paramount in our consumerist society, to the extent that we have become stressed. We are out of touch with our bodies and our emotions, and have become focussed on the mental task of keeping up with the 'rat race'. We work like stink and are often too tired to play, except slumped in front of the telly or getting 'out of it' in the pub. Green consciousness means honouring ourselves as part of the physical and spiritual world. It's not just the earth that needs healing but us too.

We need to relax and play as much as we need to work, even though it does seem as if we are in the middle of the third world war, fighting to protect the very planet we live on."²

In the newspaper office where I helped, there was a great emphasis upon the 'false' distinction between work and play which is seen to exist in wider society. The prevalent ethos emphasized not setting up such strict boundaries between work life, and life outside; developing relationships with people 'in the office'. Developing such friendships was seen as part of the process, as was giving oneself time to stop and have conversations or the spontaneity to leave the office and

² 'Comment', Ann Morgan. 'Glastonbury Times'. November/December. 1989.

climb the Tor on a sunny afternoon, even if it meant delaying the piece of work. This ethos was not quite so prevalent as deadlines approached.

Although many of the people I spoke to said they would like to live independently of the larger state structure, it was common for people to be supported by social security payments. Amongst the travelling community who have a particularly strong individualist and independent ethos, shown in wanting to live outside of the institutions of society as far as possible, there is an clear contradiction in the aim to live outside of society and their dependence upon the state. In general people in the alternative community recognize a disparity between their ideals and the reality of their dependence upon the State. It is a source of discussion, debate and controversy. Both settled members of the alternative community and travellers are trying to find a way of earning their living and 'getting off the dole', but as they often complain the leap between the two is hard to cross and the legal penalties for 'cash in hand' work are severe. It is this development of an economic infrastructure that I wish to discuss in the next section, and which I maintain exhibits a strongly individualistic flavour.

Economic Infrastructure

During the period between my initial pilot study of Glastonbury over the summer of 1987 and my extended fieldwork from 1989 to 1990, the physical outlook of the town changed considerably. Walking down the main street of the town it soon becomes obvious that the number of shops selling what are awkwardly termed 'New Age' or 'alternative' products, has doubled over the last three years. Weighted particularly towards the bottom of the High Street, developing a top/bottom division of 'straight' and 'alternative' enterprises, shops vary in their products from organic and whole foods, recycled products, cafes, clothes, jewellery,

decorative furnishings, statuettes of earth goddesses, to perfume oils, Celtic shields, crystals, ritual swords, books and therapy centres. One of the members of the alternative community who has himself opened a shop front on the High Street, commented on this trend,

"The alternative community needs to find a way to support itself, to survive we have to develop an economic infrastructure. There's a growing alternative tourist trade in Glastonbury, people visiting the town as a sacred site and for its reputation as being part of the alternative movement. This is replacing the traditional tourist trade of coachloads of visitors to the abbey and we need to tap into that."

'Tapping in' on the alternative tourist trade, 'developing an economic infrastructure', these are key words in the struggle of the alternative community to earn a living consistent with their beliefs. I examine the way in which economic enterprises are developing, people's attitudes to work, and the ethos of individualism which, I suggest, underpins many of their actions.

Before looking at the actual case studies, I feel it is important to look at the underlying 'notions', the influences that perhaps direct and justify the distinctly New Age economic activity. Here I have chosen to examine briefly two articles; the first is E.F.Schumacher's 'Buddhist Economics'³ which has been highly influential in green politics, ecology and 'alternative economics' since the mid-1970's, and secondly I wish to look at the nature of the informal economy as discussed by Ullrich Koeker⁴.

³ 'Buddhist Economics', E.F. Schumacher. From 'Thinking Green', ed. Michael Allaby. Barrie and Jenkins, London. 1989. p.181.

⁴ 'Immigrants-Entrepreneurs of the Future', Ullrich Koeker. From 'Common Ground'. June-July 1989. p.6-8.

The collection of articles and lectures given by Schumacher has almost twenty years later inspired and influenced the environmental movement to the extent that a college has been opened in his name and 'small is beautiful' has become a coined phrase. Read by many people within Glastonbury, his economic ideas have become household terms amongst the alternative community. 'Buddhist Economics' outlines his attitude towards work and earning a living; he begins by explaining the title,

"Right Livelihood is one of the requirements of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It is clear, therefore, that there must be such a thing Buddhist Economics."⁵

In contrast to the 'Right Livelihood' ethic, Schumacher identifies the position of modern mainstream economists as one that aims to minimize labour, maximize short-term production, and to use man as a tool; consumption is the sole end purpose of economic activity. Schumacher proposes small-scale enterprises where 'the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption.'⁶

Furthermore he outlines what he calls a 'Buddhist' approach to work, which develops the idea of 'Right Livelihood' as an intrinsic element,

"The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold; to give a man a chance to use and develop his facilities; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forward the goods and services needed for a becoming existence... To organize work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-wracking for the observer becomes little short of criminal; it would indicate a greater concern with

⁵ *ibid* 3.p.181

⁶ *ibid* 3. p.181

goods than with people, an evil lack of comparison and a soul destroying degree of attachment to the most primitive side of this worldly existence."⁷

This three-pronged approach to work mirrors many of the attitudes expressed in Glastonbury. Firstly, people are looking for work which is creatively satisfying for the individual; work in 'conventional job roles' is often distrusted on the basis that they suppress the individually innate and creative spirit. For this reason, a flexible attitude to work prevails, one careful not to inhibit the human spirit. For example, when I was helping in an office to prepare for the Harmonic Convergence of 1987, I was told 'come in when you feel moved to' or 'with the flow'. The second point about ego-centeredness is particularly interesting in relation to Glastonbury; it highlights the complementary relationship between individualism and community in New Age ideology. The notion of community and working together is very strong, and yet the means by which it is achieved is highly individualistic, since most business enterprises are owned and managed by one, or perhaps two, people. With the third prong, to bring forward the necessary goods for existence, we see the critical stance against the materialism and consumerism of 'wider society' combined with the recognition by some members of the alternative community of the need to develop an economic infrastructure which is sound, and not one based upon ecological or human exploitation.

The other influential factor in the developing economic infrastructure in Glastonbury is the informal economy which has evolved alongwith the burgeoning immigrant alternative community. As in many areas of Britain with a high low income population, people stretch out

⁷ *ibid* 3.

their incomes by taking on and combining different forms of work and support. In his article on immigrants leading an alternative lifestyle on the West Coast of Ireland, Ullrich Kockel⁸ broadens the definition of informal economy beyond tax evasion and includes the following features: non-monetarized exchange [barter], occupational pluralism, lack of commercialisation and market orientation, and primary goals other than utility or profit. These features serve to describe the nature of the 'basic economy' in Glastonbury, although certain factors like the profit motive do exist and are becoming increasingly common as luxury good stores selling ornaments and handmade shoes at high prices find a market. However barter between people- swapping resources and trading services dependent on need rather monetary basis- does exist. For example, in one office space, half the office was loaned out to a man running a word processing and accounting service. In return for the facilities he gave two days of his time to doing word processing for the main tenant of the office space. Occupational pluralism, people working part-time in a variety of occupations requiring different skills, is also common. It is quite usual for people to work in a bar/cafe/shop and also perhaps make a small income as a musician, gardener or healer. Many people recognize this as a positive element of the alternative community as it gives people the chance to explore different aspects of their personality. These elements of the alternative community in Glastonbury have existed in this way for many years; it is the new and more 'formal economy', based on High Street shops and Enterprise Allowance businesses, that is an innovation.

As the economic infrastructure evolves through shared discussion and exchange of ideas, as well as through the development of individual

⁸ *ibid* 4. Kockel.

enterprises, we see an interesting reflection of the values of the group. With its emphasis upon finding work to 'nurture the inner self' as well as the prevalence of one person small businesses, we see the larger individualist ethos emerging. Many people have taken advantage of the 'Enterprise Allowance' schemes to set up small businesses, a scheme initiated by Margeret Thatcher's government in the 1980's. With small businesses, free market basic wages and the ethos of individualism, the bottom of Glastonbury High Street can, in some respects, be seen as part of the Thatcherite dream.

Case Studies

I have looked at a number of enterprises in Glastonbury, in greater or lesser depth. Often it was difficult to get the basic information about people's financial situation and funds, largely because in very few instances was it appropriate for me to ask direct questions. In general people were much more interested in talking about the delights of organic tomatoes or the dreams they had the previous night, rather than how they pay the rent. However, I have collected a number of case studies which I feel constitute a representative sample, and which display both the types of enterprises that are evolving and how people are structuring them as they develop. Note again that all of these enterprises are businesses run by one or two people on a capitalist basis with a strong entrepreneurial flavour though with rather a varying emphasis on profit. "Enterprise allowance culture" could be the most apt description of work in Glastonbury. In general they were highly individualistic, I found only one small food distribution co-operative and a Somerset county-wide organic farmers co-operative, but no other co-operatively run ventures in Glastonbury or the surrounding area. The following case studies are all slightly fictionalized.

A Spiritual Healing Centre

The two main healers here had originally operated from home attending clients in their homes; they then rented a room in Glastonbury for the weekly meditation and healing workshops for which there was a voluntary charge of £1. In the winter of 1990 they announced that they needed £3000 to set up and move to new premises. They were therefore appealing for funds through donations, 'manifestations', [money appearing through spiritual requests], and fund-raising to finance the move. At Easter 1990 they moved to the new premises and held a raffle and a weekend of concerts and workshops to further raise money. I think people have a similar relationship to the 'National Federation of Spiritual Healers', the national organisation of which Glastonbury is a part, as others might have to their local church because the centre has been going on for three years with regular attendance and so people have a long-term commitment towards maintaining it.

A High Street Shop

Now a High Street shop front business, this enterprise started in a tent in Molesworth. The business has evolved into a recycled photocopying, printing and stationery store, in which a variety of publications by the owner and others on the subject of travellers, festivals and sacred sites are sold. It is run by one man who employs people to work in the shop at a flat rate of £10 a day. This works out at less than £2 an hour.

A Newsletter and Information Publication

'Networking', making contacts, is considered an important part of 'spreading the light' in the New Age movement. This newsletter and information publication combined used to be based in Totnes but in February 1990 the two owners moved to Glastonbury. They publish a magazine which comes out three times a year and is free. It has a very short editorial section and is mostly taken up with the advertising which supports it. It is really an information network for the 'human potential movement' in the South-west. They also publish a mailshot which comes out once a month advertising events in the area. They also do the lay-out for similar small scale publications, charging their fees on the basis of the venture and what it can afford. They did the lay-out for the newspaper, the alternative publication in Glastonbury which I helped to produce and offered a basic fee of £100 whereas another printer had previously been charging £185. They say that they work very much on the basis of whether they warm to it, and are prepared to work through weekends and in the evening to get something done. Since they work from where they live this cuts down their expenses.

A High Street Cafe

A vegan cafe and bakery in the High Street and also caterers and suppliers of vegan food; 'food evangelists', as they are sometimes referred to. They change from being a 'restaurant' to a take-away and alter their image quite regularly. The business is run by one man and owned by him. Around five women run the cafe, and living together as well, they pool their resources to feed and look after their children. They make their own tofu and cakes/pastries which they supply to the local wholefood shop, as well as distributing their goods as far a field as London.

I worked in the cafe for a while. They take on frequent casual labour, paying £2/hr, and some people work there washing dishes in exchange for food. A woman living with 'the family' explained it to me as a group of single mothers who had clubbed together to beat the poverty trap so they could run a creche together, share bringing up children etc. They are able to run vehicles on the business and give their children things like fruit juice to drink. However, the structure of the family is more complex than this.

A Spiritual Community and a Guest House

A spiritual community and guest house, run by an airline pilot and his wife who received a message that they were 'to take the light to Glastonbury'. They came and found a huge ramshackle old house which they managed to buy for almost half the asking price. They claim that their finances run very much along the concept of 'manifestation' i.e. they will ask the Spirit for money to come into their lives and it will. The literature they provide, 'The Story of Ramala' reinforces this, [p.18]

"In the first year alone over 700 visitors came to the Ramala Centre and David and Ann were introduced to the Law of manifestation. As work needed to be done in the house, and that need was expressed, so people appeared at the front door to fulfil that need.'

People come to the centre and, receiving a small salary, live and work as part of the community. They run a guest house/B&B where the more 'prestigious' members of the New Age movement stay when they come to Glastonbury. They charge £25 per person per night.

An Example of a Mixed Income

One woman, very keen on holistic ideas, believes that it is possible to combine ventures which range from that of a newspaper, badge-making and small scale farming to form a mutually supporting unit. She also believes that work and play should not be segregated, and that we should simultaneously be involved in both. For example, we should feel free to play in our work and not having the '9-5' mentality towards work, closing ourselves off from it after hours. In fact she once severely criticized me for saying that I couldn't work on a newspaper article in the evening because someone was coming to supper. Her answer was that I should involve that person in the process and not cut work and social life apart.

She owns a field which she lives on in a trailer, She has been doing a course on permaculture which she hopes to implement on the field. Eventually she hopes to run weekend workshops on the field on topics such as women's assertiveness. I am not sure, but she either brought the field with the money from her divorce settlement or from money her mother gave her. At present she is living off money her mother gave her and is supporting the newspaper with it.

She rents an office for the newspaper in Glastonbury and pays around £30 per week. The newspaper which used to come out every month now comes out four times a year. It costs £1 and sells a couple of hundred. It does not support itself, and although my informant is hoping it will in time she is at present funding it with money from a gift. However, the situation is changing as two friends have brought a separate office property and the computer software where she will be able to do the layout, print out the newspaper herself, and have a rent free office. She also talked of applying for local grants, particularly from the Clark Foundation. However up till this point, she had been hoping to fund

herself by her badge-making business - these are 'consciousness raising badges', 'sending out a message' with phrases such as 'glasnost' (with a picture of the Tor) and 'better a happy hippy than a yucky yuppie' or 'divorce is caused by marriage'. She hoped that this would provide financial support and had involved two others in the scheme. However, as yet it was not providing a substantial income.

Prosperity Consciousness

Sheltered by a rowan tree in the court-yard of the Glastonbury Experience on a wooden seat carved into feet and ornate twirls, people often sit outside in the summer, occasionally buying cold drinks or a salad from the nearby cafe but mostly playing the guitar, chatting and watching people pass by. Travellers rest with their dogs, the scent of incense floods the air and tourists from outside the town stray in cautiously. It is an open space. Above the court-yard and behind the balcony are a maze of rooms, many of which are used for workshops, yoga, meditation meetings and individual therapy sessions. Some of these meetings are free or on a loose donationary basis but many have a minimum fee. Below in the courtyard people complain about people charging money for spiritual teachings. There exists an uneasy marriage between spirituality and materialism. Many healers have to charge in order to support themselves and continue healing; however particularly for those who cannot afford to pay, there is a feeling of bitterness and complaints about exploitation of spiritual energy for personal gain.

Money, materialism and spirituality; combining the three is seen as a difficult task and people approach it in a variety of ways. As I mentioned above, some healers charge on a donationary basis, others (and the retreat centres) have a sliding scale of charges, while yet others charge

large fees seemingly without any scruple. Charging is sometimes explicitly justified on the basis that raising the money is part of the challenge and thus part of the preparation for the treatment or course. One advertising literature for a course read, 'Manifesting the fee of £45 is part of the learning- affirm that God is your supply - ask Divine Mind to support your intention'.

In a response to the uneasy relation between money and a spiritually-orientated lifestyle, a legitimating philosophy has developed; 'prosperity consciousness'. In much the same way as physical immortality lies at the edge of people's attitude to health, prosperity consciousness as it is viewed by the alternative community arouses extreme controversy. One informant told me he felt it represented the Californian rather than the European element to the New Age. So, controversial and Californian, what is 'prosperity consciousness'?

Prosperity consciousness rests on the idea that one can have a positive attitude towards attaining, and living with, material wealth. Contrary to the prevalent ethos of 'dematerialism' that hangs over much of the New Age movement, prosperity consciousness aims to dispose of the guilt many people feel at their own consumerism and materialist lifestyle. Stuart Wilde, a 'teacher of financial assertiveness and practical mysticism' has written a book entitled 'The Trick About Money is Having Some'. He argues that money is a necessary factor 'to drive the motor of your spirituality'

"Some people say 'How can you be so commercial Stuart?', but it is nothing to do with being commercial, it is all to do with emotion. It is like how do you feel powerful and resonant and at one and at

peace with yourself if some guy's trying to cut the electricity off?"⁹

Furthermore, prosperity consciousness also argues that by having a positive attitude towards money one can attract it to oneself; I was never quite sure how this worked but was always interested to learn!

"In other words, if this spirituality and the balance and the kindness and the softness work then in theory the universe has got to open up to you and give you what you want....financially, because if it does not then you are doing something terribly wrong." ¹⁰

The ethos behind prosperity consciousness is highly individualistic. It is essentially about how acquiring money fits in with the well-being of the self. The explicit aim behind Stuart Wilde's teachings is to make people into 'latter day metaphysical warriors', to raise their personal power, create their own 'battle plan', take on the material world and make it work for them. In taking on the material world Wilde is recommending an individualism consistent with the entrepreneurial ethos of taking the opportunity. He continues to develop his therapy by recommending an extended period of time during which individuals withdraw themselves from concern with the affairs- economic, political and material- of the rest of the world and concentrate upon the self.

"The number one lynch-pin of what I teach is detachment. So you dry clean your emotion as much as possible, given that you cannot detach from everything because you are still here. But you detach

⁹ 'Stuart Wilde-Interview'. Kindred Spirit, vol.1.no.11. p.11.

¹⁰ *ibid* 9 .p.11

from the emotion, so you are not really into who wins the F.A. cup, you are not really into whether or not they bring in the Poll Tax, you detach. If you percentile that over a period of years you can watch the whole of the world go past and it does not make you callous, because in a way I see detachment as infinite love, because you allow everything to be without disturbing it. " ¹¹

Wilde does not comment upon the possible consequences of a large number of people following such a philosophy of detachment, indeed he does not address the question of collective action at all in the interview; all his ideas are addressed at the self. This is consistent with what is said by Leonard Orr, the physical immortalist, who also propounds a doctrine of prosperity consciousness. In response to a direct question in which he was asked whether prosperity consciousness was not just greed he said,

"At the moment when one needs shelter you stop picking food off the trees, one enters the game of economics. One person having money doesn't necessarily take it away from the other. Every individual chooses whether or not to be greedy, this is not conditioned by how much money they actually have."

Neither Leonard Orr nor Stuart Wilde address the large scale consequences of such a philosophy. However, I suppose the logical conclusion is reached when everybody attracts money, and a kind of universal abundance is achieved. It begins to sound remarkably like free market capitalism to me.

¹¹ *ibid* 9. p.13.

Chapter Five

Individualism and Child-rearing

Introduction

"And a woman who held a babe against her
bosom said, Speak to us of Children.
And he said:
Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts."¹

Children, and even the 'child-like', are given a high status and positive value in the alternative community in Glastonbury. Consistent with the prevalent spiritual beliefs which place such strong emphasis upon 'individual expression' and 'individual creativity', children are seen as autonomous agents, as the above quotation suggests. In a manner similar to the respect given by the New Agers to the lifestyle of non-Western societies, children are often pointed to with a sense of reverence; the feeling is expressed that they have something the adult population has lost. As one parent said to me,

"We have to let our children develop in such a way that they don't lose this way of being in childhood. Children have a spiritual

¹ 'The Prophet', Kahlil Gibran. Pan books ed. 1980. p.20.

awareness which we adults ourselves need to re-discover before we can tackle the problems of the world."

Often in therapy, people talk about 're-discovering the child within'.

So what aspect of child-like characteristics are people seeking to re-discover in their adult selves, or to maintain in their children? Firstly children are seen as more in touch with their emotional selves, they are quick to express emotion, and supposedly let their emotions flow in and out freely. Secondly, and most importantly, they are seen as more intuitive, and more open to, and accepting of, the spiritual realm. They are seen as not having the doubts, fears and cynicism of the majority of the adult population; for children, tree spirits are not only possible, but plausible. Thus they are open to new, and particularly spiritual, elements of life. Accordingly, when adults talk about 'getting in touch with the child inside', they are referring to expressing emotion freely, living their lives fully and to being more open to the spiritual world. In a magazine interview with two therapists who have developed 'Voice Dialogue', a method to express the 'sub-personalities' existing within one individual, the inner child is crucial. Sidra describes her first experience.

"It was amazing! I was a one-year-old! I had dropped into being this tiny little child who was sort of all curled up inside this cave and never talked to me, had never communicated, had always kept herself to herself, for all those years, 35 years! She had never allowed herself to be with another human being! Very, very little, very tentative, I didn't want to look at him. I just wanted him there, wanted him not to intrude on me, but wanted his warmth there, not to hold me, not to intrude on me, not to talk to me.

I just wanted him to be there with me. I was 35, and I hadn't a clue that I had a child like that in me."²

In this chapter I wish to describe some of my observations of child-rearing techniques and education; it is in the socialization of children that the values of the community are self-consciously articulated, and in the contact children have with the educational institutions of the wider society where we see the boundaries and conflicts with that society clearly articulated. Although the household we lived in did not have children, in Glastonbury the presence of children is never far away; whether sitting in a courtyard cafe, watching a play or listening to a band in a smoke-filled room, one looks around at almost any hour of the day and sees a band of children running around involved in their own social adventures. The only time children are not present is during meditation meetings or spiritual discussions, yet even this was a point of dispute and contention for people. To observe the process of socialization is to witness both the inculcation of individualist values, and, in turn, to see reflected the individualist values of the group as a whole.

I base my discussion around the theme of education- formal, and informal. In the informal education I look at the crucial socializing relationship between parents and children; in particular I look at the parents' ideals, and the effect of those ideals on the children. With formal education I use a case study of a parent-run specialist school; then I turn to examine the interaction between the alternative community and the larger social structure, in the context of New Age children attending the state school.

² 'Hal Stone and Sidra Winklemen, Originators of Voice Dialogue', interview by Philip Rogers, *Kindred Spirit*, Autumn 1990, p.23.

Informal Education - 'Free Beings'

'Individualism' underlies all attitudes towards the younger generation in Glastonbury; in essence the child is seen as independent, autonomous, and with an existing personality which needs only nourishment to develop. From before the birth this autonomy and individuality are recognized. It is not uncommon as part of the birthing process to hold a small ritual during labour to welcome the new soul entering the world. This ranges from the simple saying of prayers, to the lighting of incense or chanting and playing drums. People are quick to criticize the 'seen and not heard' philosophy of the larger British society, the perceived ethos that children's views are not important, and not sufficiently worthy of 'adult airspace' to be expressed publicly. As one mother said,

"I had a child five years ago when I was forty so I've had plenty of experience of being an adult and not having a child, but I find British people in general seem to hate children. They send them off to bed as early as possible and seem to avoid contact with them, not like other countries where the children are running around the cafes at 11pm at night. We don't have to be strict disciplinarians as parents, there are ways of getting our point across creatively without being dogmatic. Some of my friends always let their child interrupt them when they are having a conversation because they believe everything that the child has to say is important and needs to be recognized."

Interestingly, in response to this statement, a man who was not a parent replied,

" I understand what you mean, don't get me wrong, I love having children around, it's just that if a child keeps interrupting I find the energy channels around adults get blocked."

In contrast to the perceived attitude of wider British society, children in Glastonbury tend to be treated as autonomous agents who, no differently from adults, are capable of making choices to suit themselves, from their bed-time to their education. In this attitude the value of individualism and autonomy is clearly being expressed on behalf of the children. One person commented,

"I think children should be able to choose whether they want to go to school or not. If they don't, why should they be forced into doing it? They can learn as much from a tutor, or even listening to other people and spending time in nature.

Not that they even teach them the really important things at school anyway, like how to make a fire with only wet wood."

Likewise, an adolescent in Glastonbury confirmed in an interview published in 'Glastonbury Times', the alternative newspaper, that the desire for autonomy and the power to determine one's choices is well articulated by the young people themselves,

"I think that everyone should get a year off from school when they get to about 14. It's just a break in the conditioning and it's just when you start finding out about life, and it's good to give the system a break."³

The relationship between parents and child is ideally one marked by amicable behaviour. The role of the disciplinarian is understated and parents explain to their children why it 'would be a good thing' if they

³ 'A Voice of Youth', James Bloom. 'Glastonbury Times', Spring Equinox. 1990. p.16.

did or did not do a certain action, rather than direct commands such as 'do this' or 'do that'. It is only if the parent is severely fraught themselves that they would ever consider hitting a child; most of the children's socialization takes the form of negotiation. For example, a request for the child to play outside might be presented as 'Adam, how would you feel about being outside while I meditate. I really need the space in the creativity room.'

Melford Spiro, in his study of children on the kibbutz⁴, cites a paper by Elizabeth Irvine who suggests a psychodynamic motive for amicable collective child-rearing practices that exist in the kibbutz. Irvine suggests that for people who have themselves rebelled, it is difficult to take on the responsibilities of parenthood, since this involves identification with the parents they have rejected. By the kibbutz assuming collective responsibility for the children and placing them in the hands of professionals, adult kibbutzniks are relieved of the necessity for asserting authority themselves, as well as of the fear of alienating their children as they themselves were alienated. Similarly the parent figures who joined the alternative community in Glastonbury are rebels-against their family or against the prescribed norms of society. I would suggest, following Irvine's line of argument, that the encouragement of children to form autonomous groups, and the independent nature of the children's lives can be partially explained by their parent's¹ reluctance to take responsibility for roles that they themselves had previously been alienated by. Spiro writes,

"..a dominant theme is the maintenance of amicable parent-child relationships. "We want our children to be our pals," is the way in which this desire may be summed up, "and to destroy the barrier

⁴ 'Children of the Kibbutz', Melford Spiro, Harvard University Press, Boston. 1972.

that conventionally exists between parents and children. We don't want our children to duplicate our own experiences. We had little in common with our parents and, indeed, we rebelled against them. We don't want our children to rebel against us."⁵

In Glastonbury one does not find the formal collective education and upbringing of the kibbutz, although there are a group of single mothers who live together and bring up their children collectively in order to 'beat the poverty trap of single parenthood', mentioned briefly in passing in the previous chapter. However shared responsibility is evident in some measure even in the groups that live as 'traditional' nuclear families where it is not uncommon for the children to spend a lot of time away at a friend's house from a very early age. Thus what Spiro writes concerning the kibbutz could equally well represent the people of Glastonbury.

As I suggested in the introduction, child-rearing and education are most revealing areas of community life, for in the socialization of children we see the replication of key social values. As the parents interact with their children they consciously or unconsciously inculcate something of their own experiences or value system, perhaps including their rebelliousness. Likewise the social habits and even the means of expression of the children reveal what their parents have taught them [although they are obviously also influenced by the school system, media and their age peers]. Thus, a friend recounted a story of walking down from the Tor behind a woman strolling with her toddler son. The little boy kept stopping, picking up stones, and saying 'Mummy, what kind of energy is in this stone?'

A similar experience happened to me while we were flat-hunting. My partner, Anthony, and I arrived at a big old house and rang on the

⁵ *ibid* 4., p.13-14.

door bell. It was answered by a five year old boy who then proceeded to show us around the flat on one floor. We caught sight of some adults as we climbed the stairs, yet they did nothing more than raise their heads and smile. We felt that how we got on with the child and dealt with the situation was a test of the kind of people we were. At the end of the tour we were brought downstairs to meet the parents who were the owners of the house. The little boy proceeded to sit on my lap and asked me a series of quite personal questions while the parents half-listened and half-talked to Anthony. The boy pressed my stomach and said 'do you have a baby in there?' I replied that I didn't and then he asked 'would you like to have a baby in there?' 'Someday perhaps,' I answered. Then came the next question, 'are you going to have a baby with that man there?' He pointed at Anthony. It seemed safest to reply again 'someday perhaps'. The boy, without appearing to change his line of inquiry, moved to his next and final question, 'so, do you have any caffeine in you?' In his final question is revealed his image of what people from beyond his natal home and immediate social group are like; to some, caffeine is a symbol of the wider or 'outside' society.

Another example arose in connection with the ethos of environmental awareness in Glastonbury. 'Green issues' are impressed upon children very strongly. The adolescent interviewed in 'Glastonbury Times' (see above) commented rather amusingly,

"What we're all interested in is the environment. Pretty much everyone's aware of the greenhouse effect. I've stopped using spraycans now for graffiti, unless they're ozone friendly."⁶

⁶ ibid 3

In addition, in the same interview one finds certain 'alternative' attitudes about mainstream society are clearly revealed,

"There's a lot of wierd people in Glastonbury but there's a hell of a lot of nice people who became hippies and drop outs. They are not just run of the mill, average housewives, secretaries or business people but they have escaped from that reality."

A children's community play was a particularly interesting example of a vehicle for replicating the values of the parents in the children. The story was set in a town called 'Vegansville', and was based upon some rulers who ate too much food and nightly gorged themselves on chocolate in a 'chocolate frenzy'. The players had costumes with big hoops in them to make them look really fat and bloated. Then there were the people who just ate vegetables, who were kind and good. Their lives revolved round notions of love; they were kind people and yet were dominated by their chocolate loving rulers. Eventually the vegetable eaters won the day and were liberated from the rulers, and everyone lived happily ever after.....

Formal Education

The dictates of the larger state structure, that children receive some level of education at school or at home, as well as a genuine concern to educate their children, means that the alternative community often finds itself face-to-face with the institutions of British society; not only face-to-face but also in confrontation. In response, several alternatives to formal schooling have been sought; some who can afford it have sent their children to Rudolf Steiner schools, others have joined together and set up small, independent schools usually run by parents. Others have continued to educate their children within the larger state system.

One woman whom I talked to about motherhood, said that she was torn between the pull of bringing up a child in a protected environment where they would not be subject to the influence of the values of violence and aggression of the outside world, and running the risk of over-protecting them which in turn might lead them to rebell. In this section I wish to discuss a case study of a specialist alternative school, and then in contrast look at the confrontations and problems encountered by parents who educate their children within the larger state system.

a) A specialist school

Many parents I spoke to with very young children were hoping to set up a small parent-run school in Glastonbury, but during the period of my fieldwork only one existed, outside the town. My contact with this school was limited as I was never present while the classes were in progress, and only gathered my data through extended conversations with adults involved. The reason why I never attended the classes was that there had been a large turnover of teachers during the academic year and the parents felt that to introduce another stranger into the classroom would disrupt the children still further. However the data I did receive, albeit second-hand, concurred with other accounts I have been told about concerning similar projects elsewhere.

"We want to look at the whole and everyone's needs within that whole. In my vision living itself would be an education. it should be about who we are and how we live, a natural and integrated part of what we do. It was industrialism which put up these boundaries between work, education and life."

These were the words of one of the teachers, who was also a parent, to describe the ethos behind the school, and also his vision of education. What steps were made in the direction of fulfilling such a vision, and how were they reflected in the teaching style of the school?

Firstly, in administration and organization the school was originally started by a body of trustees, some of whom came from an education background who wanted to make education a more fulfilling process. They spent three years considering various ideas before getting together with a group of parents and looking for some way in which to put these ideas into practice. A building was found which the parents converted into a space suitable for a school. The school opened, and during the year was beset with problems of getting, or maintaining, teachers. In between teachers the teaching role was shared between seven to eight people, none of whom remained the whole time. The reason why one of the teachers resigned was because she felt that she was not being allowed enough autonomy by the Trust. She complained that the Trust members were continually interfering and questioning her teaching methods. With a series of similar incidents the relationship between the Trust and parents deteriorated to such a point that the Trust withdrew and the school was solely run by parents. There were no mandatory fees, although a donation of £400 per term was asked for, and the rest was raised by the fund-raising activities of the parents. I came into contact with the school at the end of the first year, a period which had been marked by instability as a basic structure was still forming. The parents had rejected the hierarchical relationship with the Trust, and found themselves running the school in order to determine its direction satisfactorily.

The children came from a variety of backgrounds, and from a ten mile radius. Some of the children had been unhappy in state schools; their

parents had been worried about them and looked for an alternative. At the beginning of the school year there had been eighteen children but the numbers had dropped. A man who was both parent and teacher in the school told me they played co-operative games. Clearly there was training for holism here! Children were encouraged to share toys, and other resources, and many of the teaching sessions were held with both children and teachers sitting cross-legged in a circle. When I asked him about sex-roles he said that they tried to reduce them; the 'natural differences' emerged, but they tried not to encourage them. He also said they aimed to make the act of teaching a more interactive one, where the distinction between the teachers and pupils were lowered. The children were to be viewed with respect, particularly in view of their sensitive spiritual awareness.

The methods teachers used to bring about the sort of ideals and aims listed above were through small classes, teaching topics rather than subjects, and by extensive contact with nature, a style of teaching fast going out of fashion in mainstream education. The school was one big classroom, with only the infants separated from the rest, and the teacher/pupil ratio was high; it was felt easiest to respond to individual needs in such a structure and yet also ensure the children were not restricted to interacting with one age group. When teaching by topics one theme is looked at from a number of different angles. For example, Native Americans: by looking at the structure of a tipi the children are taught angles and geometry, by finding out where they live, they learn geography, and they learn music by singing Native American chants. The children sang their chants sitting in a circle and did an exercise in looking at things from other people's perspectives. A teapot was placed in the centre of the circle, and everybody was told to draw it. Two teachers sitting in different positions in the circle got up and looked at each other's

pictures. They enacted a small drama where they asked one another why they had not drawn the same picture. This was intended to show that different people look at things in different ways. Lastly, the children are encouraged to have a close relationship with nature. There are weekly visits to a site of land where there is a group of people who live without water or electricity; this gives the children the opportunity to learn that some do live without modern conveniences. It also gives the children the chance to run wild in the woods, and for leadership roles to emerge among them which are different from those of the classroom.

The long-term future of the school was uncertain during my period of fieldwork. The parents had decided not to take on official status as a school and not to follow the demands of the 'National Curriculum'. One problem facing the parents was the fact the school only catered for children up to the age of eleven, and so most children would have to be streamed off into the state school system. However at the time I was there they were more preoccupied with how to keep the present school going.

The following extract of a poem was found on the notice board at Park School, Dartington, and printed in 'Glastonbury Times' as representative of how the teacher/pupil relationship should be. I feel that it represents the ideals of the people I spoke with in Glastonbury.

Teacher

I will know you.

I will touch you and hold you
and smell and taste and listen

To the noises that you make - and the words, if any.

I will know you.
 Every atom of your small, lonely
 Aching, raging, hurting Being
 Will be known to me
 Before I try to teach you
 I must first reach you.

And then, when I have come to know you, intimately,
 I will insist, gently, gradually, but insist
 That you know me.
 And later that you trust me
 And then yourself.

b] Interaction with the state school system

Sarah, age 8

"I don't like going to school, everyone's so straight."

Rowan, mother,

"When my children go to school I try to dress them so they look as trendy as possible. If they were dressed and looked like a couple of hippie kids, that just wouldn't be fair on them. Besides, they refuse to wear anything that's a bit hippie-like, they want to fit in and be like all the other kids."

Children whose parents are involved in the alternative community stand out to a lesser or greater degree. Children are sensitive to difference among their peers, and whether it is a long lock of hair at the back of their necks, the battered old car, the pink trousers or long hair of their

father, or the tofu in their lunchbox, they are marked as 'alternative'. Such a difference has been highlighted over recent years as a car park situated next to a primary school in Glastonbury became host to a number of travellers' vans and buses. Accusations of hepatitis and aggressive dogs became rife in the local newspaper, and set off a tidal wave of resentment in the town. One of the 'local' mothers with children at the school said to me,

"I hate those travellers' and all the hippies, I do. They just let their dogs run around right next door to where my kids come out of school. And they're all filthy, the kids even. I say live and let live I do, but not with them around, they don't let me just live."

Such remarks and attitudes cannot help but be absorbed within the minds of the children, particularly since Glastonbury is situated in a rural area with an otherwise fairly homogeneous population. The children from 'New Age' parents stand out; however they exist in sufficient numbers I believe to withstand much bullying or aggression from other children. The confrontation lies largely in the clash between the values of the parents and the values of the school system.

Although many children no doubt pass through the state system happily and many of the children/adolescents I met were doing well within it and forming friendships, some did have problems. The following case study illustrates this.

The Haircut

A boy of about eleven was attending the local state school. From an idea he had doodled down on a piece of paper for a haircut a friend offered to do it for him, and so he started to attend school with a haircut which was slightly unusual but was short and involved no hair dye. His parents were

happy with it and thought it would cause no problems. However when one of the school teachers noticed it, he was challenged with the statement, 'what made you think you could get away with that haircut?' He was sent to the headmaster. 'Glastonbury Times' chose to write this story up as an example of the problems of the alternative community with the state school structure. The story was reported in the newspaper as follows,

"He found himself in the Headmaster's office. The Headmaster, who seems fearful of any hint of individuality lest it reached epidemic proportions, pronounced the haircut 'ostentatious'. The boy, therefore, was unfit to socialize with other pupils during breaks and mealtimes. Three options were offered. He could be taken by a staff member to have his tonsure cut off, be segregated, or go home.

He was delivered home that afternoon by the deputy head, to think on advice from the Headmaster "to score a century at cricket if he wanted to do something different, and laudable."⁷

The boy's parents were upset about the reaction of the school and chose to support him in his actions. They felt the school was being hypocritical since it allowed highlights, perms, and other 'fashion' creations with the aid of hairspray, and yet it did not allow 'creative design' on the head. The boy took the situation a step further; it is reported as in 'Glastonbury Times'

"He had felt vulnerable, that his individuality was threatened and his creativity at risk. He felt in need of protection and wanted to express that symbolically.

Coming from an enlightened family he knew about runes,

⁷ 'Community Education Haircut', Glastonbury Times, Summer 1990

and that the rune symbol of protection is the C.N.D. symbol inverted. This was the symbol he chose to use, and decided that the only possible place it would be seen [and thus have the necessary impact] was on his head....A C.N.D. symbol was bleached into the back of his head."

Predictably the school acted in an authoritarian way, and this time he had broken a school rule by bleaching his hair. When the boy became very upset at the disciplinary attitude of the school, the parents in turn became angry and voiced their opinions to the school. The dispute then turned to being one between the parents and the school, rather than involving directly the boy who had by this stage dyed his whole head brown. The headmaster went so far as to suggest that the parents should consider sending their child to another school if they did not agree with the rules.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described some of the pertinent and prominent issues surrounding child-rearing in the alternative community, with a particular emphasis upon education. In some respects children, particularly adolescents, in Glastonbury are very similar to those of the larger British society. As most households have television they are subject to the same mass-media influences as any other child. Thus at the time of my fieldwork 'acid house' music was very popular and regular acid house discos were held in the Assembly Rooms. Some teenagers seemed more removed from 'mainstream culture' than others, such as the sixteen year old who told a woman not to worry about her miscarriage because the spirit would just re-incarnate. However in socialization, certain values from their parents were passed on and inculcated; for example, the high status placed upon children generally, the emphasis

upon personal freedom, autonomy and individuality. Furthermore in the replications of the values of the community, in the context of the contact the children have with the wider society, we have a window through which we can see the boundaries of community.....

Chapter Six

Gender, Conflict and Social Relations.

Introduction

In Glastonbury, human communication, like any other activity, is about the exchange of energy. 'She's got good energy', 'just feel the aggressive energy at the meeting', or 'your energy is so forceful'; these are common ways of describing social interaction in the alternative community. An atmosphere, a 'vibration', energy can be generated and exchanged like an electrical current. Not only are situations described in terms of the energy that is present, but as we see in the description of the meditation groups, energy can also be generated by people and manipulated by them. The extracts below, from a letter in the Summer 1990 edition of 'Kindred Spirit', bear witness to this, and exemplify the way in which connections between people are conceptualized on a spiritual basis. The authors of the letter, Ann and Paul Adams, are describing an unintended involvement with the infamous Poll Tax demonstration in London, March 1990,

"It soon became obvious from the banners that it was the Poll Tax demonstration, which we had completely forgotten about. The atmosphere was very tense and excited....

We went back to the Cafe and went and sat down. About five minutes later the vibration level went up and all hell appeared to have broken loose outside. We looked out of the window and it appeared to be raining - then we realized it was rocks, pieces of scaffolding and glass flying through the air....

We went to the back and sat down in a corner, deciding there was work to be done. We went into meditation straight away using the

Charing Cross as our focus as this is a very powerful energy point. We started to say the Great Invocation together, silently. As we reached the word 'love' the whole place started to buzz, as we said the word 'Christ' the whole thing went wouf, like a fountain of energy, for a moment I couldn't remember the next words to say. We continued this way for what seemed a very long time but it was actually only a few moments....As soon as we'd gone into meditation and sent up the call we felt an enormous group of people with us, some we recognized as being part of our local Fountain group but thousands and thousands more, like points of light...We could feel the energy pulsing down through us and into the Earth, and how it spread out gradually from around us and around the Charing Cross. At first it felt difficult for the energy to push through the enormous cloud of negativity and then, gradually, the Love spread and the atmosphere became calmer."

Indeed, the spiritual is of utmost importance amongst people in Glastonbury; it is from this point that all other relationships develop. In this chapter I wish to pinpoint three areas of social organization which are strongly embodied in spiritual ideas; the de-signifying of formal roles, the resolution of conflict, and issues surrounding gender. I intend to examine how these notions manifest themselves in everyday social interaction. Once again the theme of individuality is prevalent; the 'space' around an individual is to be respected, and the individual is to be recognized over and above work roles, statuses, or even families. However, by the very nature of social interaction which is communicative, elements of holism are implied. Thus we see a complement of individualism and holism; individualism, in the perception

of humans as autonomous agents, and 'holism' in the notions of 'exchange of energy' and interaction between people.

a) **The de-signifying of formal roles**

Glastonbury constructs itself as an 'alternative community'.

Accordingly, they play down or even reverse many of the conventions and social relations from mainstream society; this is particularly evident in what constitutes 'formal relationships', or 'named relationships', in mainstream society. An example can be found in means of address; in mainstream society it is usual for a child to address her/his mother as 'Mum' or 'Mummy'. However in the alternative community it is more likely that the child will use the mother's Christian name, playing down the formal parent/ child relationship by addressing each other as individuals rather than roles.

'Instant friends' - In Glastonbury it is common, when meeting someone for the first time, to give them a hug. At first I found this somewhat disarming after the ubiquitous British handshake, to find my whole body being tightly squeezed by a stranger. However, once used to it, the hug and the handshake serve the same purpose; the one involves a small part of the body coming into contact, and the other, a larger surface area. The difference between the two reflects the propensity for touch among the alternative society in comparison to larger British society. It is not uncommon to walk down the High Street and to pass by one or two couples of either the same or opposite sex, engaged in a long and presumably meaningful hug. It is also not uncommon, having made some contacts among the alternative community, to find oneself in one. Thus when I read the following example of 'Rajneeshpuram', the Bhagwan

Shree Rajneesh community in Oregon, it made me feel I could easily have been in Glastonbury,

"On the streets people called out gaily to one another and walked with their arms about one another's shoulders. In an office you might find one staff member teasing another and the whole group howling with laughter. Also a good deal of hugging went on. Tourists looking out of the smoky windows of their buses would see people embracing in the tea tents, in the vegetable garden, and behind the trash mashers and wonder what was going on."¹

Social communication amongst people in Glastonbury is one which is designed to lower barriers between individuals at the earliest point possible. To discuss the topic of friendship under the title of the 'de-signifying of formal roles' may well beg the question, how is friendship a formal role? In Western culture we usually think of friendship as the least formal kind of relationship. After all, it is voluntary, not ascribed to people, and based upon the quality of face-to-face interaction. Indeed, Paine refers to friendship as 'a personal and private relationship'.² However I suggest that friendship in mainstream society is often a very carefully negotiated relationship; people develop friendships over a period of time with caution as a feeling of mutual trust evolves. In the alternative community this careful negotiation is played down; people are eager to make friends, with less caution.

Victor Turner argued that when people forget their role sets and status sets, a situation of what he describes as *communitas*, arises.³ In such a situation, all that distinguishes one person from another are their

¹ 'Rajneeshpuram', Frances Fitzgerald. From 'Cities on a Hill. A Journey Through Contemporary American Cultures'. Picador, London.1986. p.274.

² 'In Search of Friendship: An Exploratory Analysis in 'Middle-class' Culture', Robert Paine. 'Man', vol.4. no.4. Dec. 1969.p.505.

³ 'Dramas, Fields and Metaphors', Victor Turner. Cornell.1974.

personalities. In New Age thought, even the personality is considered external; it is the individual physical self or soul which remains autonomous and separate. I examine these notions in more detail in the chapter to follow. Suffice it to say that here it is clear in such 'instant friendships' we see strong notions of holism.

Thus at all the retreats and group meetings I attended people would sit in a circle, perhaps join hands for a while to 'attune'. They would tell in turn the group their name and why they 'felt moved to come.' It is interesting that, despite much sharing of personal feelings, and perhaps even personal experiences, it was usually not until much later that people would get round to telling each other where they came from, whether they had a job, and other such 'role-related' details; a reversal of mainstream British society. It was also very common to tell people whom you knew only slightly in great detail the personal details of one's life. I can remember standing in the High Street on a busy market day for an hour listening to a dream a woman had had the day before. Before this occasion I had only casually said hello to her once as she worked in a nearby cafe. I am aware, while writing this, that perhaps in America this would be more common. Indeed, a significant percentage of the population in Glastonbury are American, or have spent a lot of time there. However the difference lies in the fact that in Glastonbury such personal details are given out freely on first meeting, whilst there is little or no interest in job-roles or family-roles, which constitute the fore-most signifiers in mainstream British or American society.

Lowered work roles- In Glastonbury I was rarely asked 'what do you do?' As I was in fact an anthropologist, I would try to discreetly volunteer the information in order that people might be aware of my position while talking to me. However as I hung around cafes and houses

engaging in long conversations doing nothing very obvious with my time, I always seemed to be surrounded by others engaged in similar occupations. No one really discussed readily how they supported themselves financially, which was a source of frustration to me since I knew how I was supporting myself doing 'nothing' all day, but what about the rest of the people? This, to a certain extent remained an enigma; one's source of money was not considered important as a topic of conversation except for those engaged in small businesses, but by the end of my fieldwork it was fairly clear that many of these people were either collecting social security or living from private incomes. Others did a variety of part-time jobs, combining different work. Resultingly discussion of job roles and statuses was infrequent.

It was not, however, the lack of work that made people attach less status and time to work roles. As I outlined in my chapter on work, people's occupations are seen as important in the sense that they should be satisfying, but they are not seen as a focal point in people's lives. It was the individual that mattered.

Correspondingly, in a work situation emphasis is placed upon developing a harmonious relationship with one's co-workers. When I was helping with the preparations for the Harmonic Convergence in 1987, in the afternoon a group 'attunement' would be held where we would sit meditating for a few minutes in a circle and hold hands. In addition the house where we lived did vegan catering for incoming courses and I would frequently do the cooking. The leader of the course would greet me in the morning, and also as he left in the evening, with a long hug. In one part-time job I became involved in, the man repeatedly became very emotional about our working together. When I said that placing so much emphasis upon the emotional in a work situation was unusual for me, he said,

"How can you separate work and the 'personal'? [as I had called it] Everything is personal. We are working together, going through the work process together and so we are bound to go through an emotional process together."

Lowered family roles- 'family' in Glastonbury is a word with many meanings; it does not automatically apply to one male and one female adult with varying numbers of children, parented by both and living in one residential unit. The word 'family' can equally easily be applied to a group of adults living together with no blood ties, to a single parent, to a spiritual group who meet regularly, or in the metaphoric sense to describe the feeling of community in the Glastonbury area. Moreover the broad use of the term is not only a matter of semantics; it reflects the lessening of the traditional nuclear family roles and a broadening area of reference for the word. The leader of one spiritual community who did not live together but had all moved to the area and bought houses described it as "it's like the family you would wish for".

As part of the lessening of family roles people often teach their children to call them by their christian names rather than 'Mum' or 'Dad'. It is interesting that when the children start to attend a mainstream school, they often start to call their parents 'Mum' or 'Dad', having called their parents by their Christian names for the first five years of their life. Within the family unit an effort is also made to play down the spouse or parent / child role- as I outlined in 'lowering of formal roles'. Often a parent will resist an authoritarian role, believing that the words of the child should be listened to with sensitivity. Likewise an effort is made not to segregate the work of the female and male parent. As it is unlikely that one partner will have a full-time job while the other stays at home to look after the children, attempts are made to share the work load

[which I shall discuss in detail in the section on 'men and women'].

However, unlike in a kibbutz where domestic management and child-rearing are communally managed, the work in Glastonbury remains within the domestic unit and so a division of labour develops. I only however witnessed one relationship where the majority of the domestic duties fell to the man.

When talking about ideal living situations, the notion of a nuclear family was one which often brought looks of horror to people's faces. As there were many single parents and a lot of the older people have come to Glastonbury as divorcees, the two parent family is rarely recognized as an ideal, or even a desirable option. People often also cite memories of the 'claustrophobia' of their own natal family to explain why they would not want to be part of one; to some the nuclear family is even classifiable as 'old age'. However people correspondingly often talk about the isolation of single living and the heavy work load of bringing up a child alone. Although some people do live communally in households, the 'commune' is often viewed with distaste and acrimony because of the high failure rate of the 1960's and 1970's. When I talked to people about communes they often said they felt they did not allow enough space for the individual. In contrast the 'green village' is often cited as an ideal which combines the need for community and individuality. One person said,

"I've lived by myself, with others, with my wife, tried out all sorts of situations. And now I'm convinced that the idea of people living together with communal land is the best idea yet. The idea is that people live with their own living space and a small piece of land around them. But at the same time there is communal land where vegetables etc can be grown communally, people share the work for that, and a common building where people can meet together

when they want company. In that way you get your own individual space and also community."

Another person said,

"Ideally I would like about four other benders or mobile homes on the field, working together on the land, yet each of us also having our own space and autonomy. I don't even want to be part of a monogamous couple anymore, I feel I can live independently and have one or two 'sweet friends', I think others are also reaching that point."

In the novel by Marge Piercy, 'Women on the Edge of Time', people lived together and had a sexual relationship with a number of others, children were conceived separately in test tubes, and there was no notion of ownership of others. A person with whom one had such a sexual relationship was called a 'sweet friend'.

In these three examples [of 'instant friends', lowered work statuses and roles, and lowered family roles], I have tried to show how the emphasis has shifted from the 'traditional' roles of wider British society, to one where people are recognized first and foremost for their individuality rather than any job role or relationship status they might hold. The emotional or 'spiritual' bond formed between two individuals is always given primary status, because this is seen as the level on which people relate as individuals rather than in roles.

b) The Resolution of Conflict

In my mind, the ideal of the 'New Age' in general, and Glastonbury in particular, conjures up the word 'harmony'; harmony with nature, harmony with others. People talk about acceptance, they aim to 'work through their anger at life', and they have a vision of a future peaceful society, the 'New Age'. However, despite the prevalent ethos of 'acceptance', situations of conflict do arise. In this section I wish to describe a means of explaining and reacting to conflict which was common in the alternative community, that I both observed and became involved in during my fieldwork.

In this section I have taken the text of my fieldwork notes and transcribed them with very little alteration, because I feel the situation of conflict and the resulting 'projection theory' I use to describe it, are best viewed through my direct and immediate reaction. As I have written in my notes,

"Because my engagement with the alternative community has been active, and because I have felt my values and 'New Age' values clash on this issue, it is an aspect of my fieldwork where I have very much felt myself to be a tool. As a tool I can feel my subjectivity. As I was working with someone with a very confrontational personality, a very strong and forceful personality, I experienced quite a lot of conflict at close quarters"

I would say that the key word for dealing with conflict in this community is projection. Projection has become a word used by New Agers and 'paperback psychologists' alike to describe one individual transferring their feelings onto another. The circumstance in which projection is used is in explaining someone's anger or displeasure in terms of an element of their personality or mental state, rather than on the actual physical terms of the situation, either to explain someone else's

anger and thus diffuse the situation, or to justify one's anger with someone else. Projection is a term recognized and used by the alternative community. In this section I adopt the term and describe how, I believe, projection is used as a means of conflict resolution within the alternative community. I will explain these two in turn, looking first at an event I witnessed, and secondly, at an event in which I was directly involved.

Diffusion- as I previously mentioned, aggressive behaviour in the alternative community is for the most part avoided. I was once in a room where one person started to get angry at another, who in turn became frustrated and upset. A third party stepped in and said 'I think it's time for a group hug'. However, when such 'at the moment' diffusion fails, a more considered explanation to make sense of angry feelings is brought in.

For example, Tommy came into the room, having just come over the road from the cafe. He sat down and started to tell Jim and I how upset he was feeling. Tommy was upset because Sarah, who worked in the cafe, had accused him of playing in a very sexual manner with a three year old girl who was running around. Sarah said she had seen Tommy pull up the little girl's skirt. In turn Tommy said that he had not been playing with the little girl sexually, although he did have a very strong monthly sexual cycle which he needed to express sometimes. However he was adamant that his sexual expression did not extend to three year old girls, and felt most insulted that he had been accused of being a child-molester. Jim intervened in his bitter complaining, saying that there was no point in being angry at Sarah because she was just 'going through her stuff' and should not be made to feel in the wrong for what are her more sensitive feelings. Jim said that 'her stuff' at the moment was obviously manifesting itself as an ultra-sensitivity to

sexuality. He said that however misplaced her feelings were she should not be put in the wrong for them. This was designed to give an explanation for Sarah's apparently unjust behaviour to Tommy, and, in turn, to diffuse the annoyance in him.

In this case, Jim explains to Tommy how Sarah is just projecting her feelings about her life onto him. She tries to make him feel 'bad' about his sexuality because she feels sensitive about her own. Not only does this take the responsibility for the situation away from Tommy but it also explains Sarah's anti-social behaviour as not entirely her fault. Thus the conflict is diffused.

Justification- the second case example I give is one where the anger was directed at me. In this example, projection was used as a way of justifying anger. The woman whom I was assisting to run a small business had just taken it over after her partner left, when I began helping with it. Her partner had taken care previously of a lot of the technical sides to producing a newspaper, and she was very anxious about her ability to perform in this area. As a result, a lot of the working tensions in the office revolved round the word-processor. Contrary to many others in Glastonbury this particular woman, Jill, welcomed confrontation. She had spent a period of time at a Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh community which sees conflict as a means of freeing people from social conditioning and waking them up. Such influences were evident in her interaction with people, and alienated a lot of people in Glastonbury.

One day towards the end of my fieldwork, she started to get irritated with me because I did not know how to use the printer. A deadline was approaching and so the atmosphere was becoming

increasingly strained. My lack of knowledge was the straw that broke the camel's back, and Jill became very angry at me,

"I'm amazed at you, you've spent all these years at a university and yet you don't know how to use a printer. Can't you learn? Honestly, you don't seem to have any sense of personal direction, you always seem to have to be taken through something as if I am teaching you, as if this is a 'tutorial'."

This, I knew was becoming a jibe at my position within the academic world, and a familiar line of attack from this particular person whenever any conflict arose. She continued,

"All you need to do is put the printer on, how are we going to reach this deadline? I can't cope - all these years you've spent at a university have repressed you, and this should be your chance to let go and find your true self."

Thus she explains her anger not so much in terms of me not being competent with the particular computer programme, but in terms of her conception of my psychological state. By commenting on her perception of my mental state, she is projecting her anger and frustration about the computer onto my mental state.³ However, in the example to follow it becomes clear that her anger with me is closely linked to her own frustration with the computer.

I was aware in the field that my consideration of these issues had been strongly influenced by my personal involvement in a conflict situation. Thus I was careful to check my ideas about projection with an

informant. I asked him to elaborate on projection in his terms and then to explain its role in Glastonbury. He took my idea a step further,

"In projection you take something which is objective and you place a subjective value onto it. In Glastonbury people act on a meta-level with projection. They are aware of what projection is. So, most people just project, but in Glastonbury 'projection' is part of the language and people start manipulating and projecting their projections."

Quite an erudite explanation!

I can explain this with my second example of Jill; the first projection comes in her associating my incompetence with my lack of personal direction. This is her stating her conscious projecting explanation regarding anger. However she is also projecting onto me her own fears about technology, and giving a subjective explanation of my objective lack of knowledge of the printer.

Examining these events, I felt it came back strongly to the issue of individualism, and also personal responsibility. Projection places the responsibility back onto the individual by explaining events and courses of action in terms of the 'personal stuff' of the individual. Just as health in Glastonbury places the well-being of one's body onto mental well-being, so conflict situations are explained in terms of the psychological 'stuff' of the people involved, rather than citing any external factors.

c] Gender Relations

"The dance is One: a movement of energy through time and space according to a casually determined design. The two "partners" are as its dual poles - the one an impulsion, the other a response. Yet

how to distinguish these two within the dance; for each is fused with the other, connected in such a way as to be the entity of relationship. Indeed, without one or the other there would be no dance, no movement, no energy in manifestation."⁴

The above quotation plays upon the 'energy' of interaction between the genders; mutually dependent, they are seen as 'dual poles' of the same essence, different but indistinguishable. The 'essence' of what constitutes a person is primary. In New Age thinking, what it is to be a man or what it is to be a woman, gender construction, is secondary, even underplayed. From an early age children are encouraged to play down sex differences and sex roles. When a young boy started to wear female clothes his mother remained unperturbed and was happy to walk around with him dressed as a girl. "He needs to explore that side to himself", she told me. It is also common for young boys to have long hair, or at least to maintain one long lock of hair down the centre of their back which they either plait and put beads in, or wear loose. As the fathers of many of the children also have long or shoulder length hair, this is only registered as unusual when the young boys go to state schools. Likewise, the parents and teachers I spoke to said they tried to help their children recognize the sex difference, but not to place a great deal of importance upon it.

When talking to people about the difference between men and women, many people constructed a model of gender differences that was based upon 'the balance of male and female elements'. It was often explained to me in terms of the masculine and feminine elements existing inside both men and women, which needed to find a harmonious balance. Obviously within a female body there would be more of the female

⁴ 'The Way of the Goddess', authoress unknown. Published by Earthsong Press, California.

essence and within the male body there would be more of the male essence. However it was felt important for each sex to recognize the presence of the other element within themselves. The following quotations from conversations draw upon this further; note that all these extracts come from male informants.

"We now have a person rather than male or female. Feminism was a necessary first stage, but I don't believe there is much difference beyond the physical, just cultural beliefs, values and processes. The witch used to be the leader of the village, and there was a strong female witchcraft movement. Men killed off herbalists as a sort of professional colonialism."

"In the age of Aquarius the male and female will not be differentiated between, although we have yet to find a way to transcend the biological and reproductive differences. Still I see each sex as having the capacity to do things equally and not even to do them in a different way."

"The gender issue is all a personal thing, and it would all become irrelevant if and when the system is changed. What we have to do is to recognize our male and female energies and then people would treat each other differently. It's not about a battle between the sexes, not about division, but about joining together."

"...by experiencing a new synthesis between the masculine and

feminine aspects of our nature we can begin to heal the wounds of our psyche thus becoming more fully integrated individuals."⁵

Connected with the notion of balance of masculine and feminine elements is a new veneration of the feminine, 'the restoration of the Goddess', as it is referred to.¹ This is seen as part of the redressing of the balance from a formerly male dominated spiritual hierarchy and society. According to many people in Glastonbury, as well as a number of feminist theologians, the establishment of the patriarchal Christian church suppressed an earlier and more Goddess-centered faith. Indeed the novel written by Marion Bradley about the Arthurian myths and based around Glastonbury, or 'Avalon', describes the suppression of Goddess-worship.⁶ Glastonbury itself is often described in terms of a female identity,

"Glastonbury is one of those places where the very shape of the landscape speaks to the people who visit or live upon Her slopes. For it is here that the Body of the Goddess can be seen outlined in the contours of the small group of hills which rise out of the flat Summerland meadows.

The Goddess appears in different forms to different people and as Her nature changes with the seasons, She presents Her many faces to those with eyes to see. For some people the whole Island is Her spread and Birth giving body."⁷

Indeed, the New Age movement as a whole is very popular with women, perhaps partially due to this veneration of the feminine in contrast to the Christian church. One leader of retreats told me that he receives many

⁵ 'Freeing the Feminine', advertisement for Wrekin Trust Conference. 27/28:10:90.

⁶ 'The Mists of Avalon', Marion Bradley. Sphere Books, London. 1984

⁷ 'The Goddess In Glastonbury', Kathy Jones. Ariadne Publications, Glastonbury. 1990.p.5.

more female clients than male. He suggested it was because women tended more to discuss their feelings in a group, and because they placed more importance upon their emotional selves. He said men 'were more likely to choose the lone path'.

It is interesting to look at Sherry Ortner's now famous feminist analogy. Ortner asserts the universal identification of women with nature and of men with culture, with the relationship between nature and culture analagous to that between women and men. Ortner stresses that the relative status of culture and men is seen as superordinate to nature and women. Thus she poses the analogy: women: men:: nature: culture.⁸ Such an identification of women with nature and men with culture does seem to hold good in New Age culture, although Ortner's analogy has received criticism in previous cross-cultural comparisons [MacCormack and Strathern].⁹ Women, in Glastonbury, are often described as being more 'in touch' with nature, more involved with their emotions and thus more 'wild'. In contrast, in male therapy groups, men are often trying to 'get in touch with the feminine inside themselves', in order to learn to experience and to express their emotions more effectively.

In Glastonbury the status of nature is seen as something to be revered, as something which we are part of rather than controlling, and towards which we should use minimum intervention. Culture is viewed as something which should respect, and even imitate, nature. Correspondingly, the status of women, at least on an ideological basis, has also risen. In this section I ask the question, has the increased status of nature and, ideologically, the increased status of the feminine, affected women's lives? I intend to look in more detail at the heightened

⁸ 'Is Female to male as nature is to culture?', Sherry Ortner. In 'Culture and Society', M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere. Stanford University Press. 1974. p.67-88.

⁹ 'Nature, Culture and Gender', Carol Mac Cormack and Marilyn Strathern. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.1980.

ideological and ritual role of the feminine, and then briefly to look at how this new role does or does not affect women's lives.

1] ideological/ritual role of the feminine

A female healer with whom I came into contact specialized in putting women in touch with themselves and supporting them to follow their spiritual paths; sometimes leaving their families and partners behind in order to do so. For the healer, part of getting in touch with one's feminine side lies in ritual, and drawing upon the female archetypes of the mother, crone, warrior and virgin. She commented that much of Christian religious ritual is male-based, praying to 'God our father'. In contrast, female spirituality is about cycles, linking women's menstrual cycle to the moon and the tides.

When I asked her about what constituted the female for her, she responded by describing the relationship between a priest and priestess, in a series of oppositions;

female/priestess	male/priest
chalice	spear/sword
void into which the seed can be dropped.	
dark receptive vessel	light and form
chaos	order
clear channel	
nuturing	
prophetic	

in combination,

"An electro magnetic partnership whereby the magnetism

of the priestess draws things into her, and the priest draws things from her."

Examining such categories for the female such as 'dark receptive vessel' and 'void into which the seed can be dropped', my initial reaction was that they were all very passive, particularly in contrast to the male categories of 'light and form' and 'spear'. When I commented upon this to the healer, she said she felt women did have a very passive role as the receiver. While some of these categories are obviously direct references to biological differences, I felt they also served to exemplify underlying conceptions of the 'new feminine' in New Age thought; one where notions of the feminine are honoured, but the characteristics for which females are respected are not necessarily ones which render them anymore equal. Furthermore, as Rosalind Coward writes,

"The issue is not really whether women's genitals are revered or reviled, but the fact that women by virtue of their bodies are rendered symbols. Far from being a new ethic, this is a time-honoured way in which women have always been treated. When any group (whether it be sexual or ethnic) becomes a symbol, the individuals in that group will be defined from the outside and suffer from that identity."¹⁰

Thus, if, as the above quotation suggests, women's status continue to be controlled, we can surmise, returning to Ortner, that while the evaluation of nature relative to culture has risen [in comparison to mainstream British culture], the status of women has risen only on an ideological, and in practice, nominal level. The next section examines to

¹⁰ 'The Whole Truth. The Myth of Alternative Health', Rosalind Coward. Faber, London. 1989. p.175.

what extent such veneration of the feminine affects women's lives in practice.

2] Everyday lives

To make a systematic study of this area would require a separate year of fieldwork in order to do justice to the breadth and complexity of the subject area. I am aware in discussing this issue in particular that my own biases and vantage point as a female emerges. For example, as a woman I was able to attend women's groups and confided in as a woman, but could not attend men's groups and knew fewer men who confided in me freely. In addition, relationships are highly individualistic and one's attention is often drawn to the unusual or flamboyant, with the result that one ignores what is less obtrusive. I have tried to be as fair and aware of this as possible in my observations.

Two of the main property owners amongst the alternative community are women. Indeed women run a number of businesses in town, and thus have a substantial degree of power in the public domain. However many of the women I spoke to felt unsatisfied with their position and treatment within New Age society in general,

"These green hairy types, they've got the knowledge and the language to express themselves, yet they're no more emancipated".

"At least you knew where you stood with straightforward chauvinists."

"They worship the Goddess, they keep talking about the Goddess and yet they can't talk to women."

"The New Age doesn't actually do a thing about changing the structures of hierarchy."

Furthermore, an incident arose over electing new members for the Trustee board for the community centre, 'The Assembly Rooms'. One woman on the board felt very strongly that the sex ratio should be equal and was suggesting a form of positive discrimination to get more women trustees. Her request was met with a negative response from the other members and she resigned. She later wrote in 'Glastonbury Times',

"The latest 'intellectual' justification for considering actual equality of numbers unimportant is that we are all a combination of male and female, striving for inner balance (roll on Nirvana!) The arguments put forward in these situations, in Glastonbury as elsewhere, are classic and very familiar. For example: "It doesn't matter what sex a person is, it's who they are that counts." "If it's more men that come forward, what are we supposed to do?" "I can't see what all the fuss is about. There are other priorities more pressing than this."¹¹

It is evident from the quotes from women, the issue over sex ratios, and the general atmosphere, that feminism is seen as 'old hat', political and divisive. Marriage is not given a high status and there were often a succession of partners in people's lives. However in the four case studies I recorded of people simultaneously having a sexual relationship with more than one person and all/most parties knowing about it, the person having a multiple sexual relationship was a man; the women were 'sharing' him and yet remaining monogamous themselves. In two of these

¹¹ 'Comment', Ann Morgan, Glastonbury Times, 1990.p.4.

cases the man had stated explicitly that he did not want the women to have other relationships. In one case the women agreed because they felt the man was a special spiritual being. Additionally, although I did meet male single parents, when partnerships break up in the majority of cases women keep the children and are resultingly tied to the domestic domain; formal childcare facilities in the area are almost non-existent, although a strong informal network does prevail. As Anthony once commented, casually,

"Why is it that when I drive up Glastonbury High Street I see lots of women walking arm in arm, or with a pushchair and a couple of children? And then I see the men separately. They have this way of walking with a determined expression, looking straight ahead beyond the crowds and into some far vision. The strange thing is, I never see the women and men together."

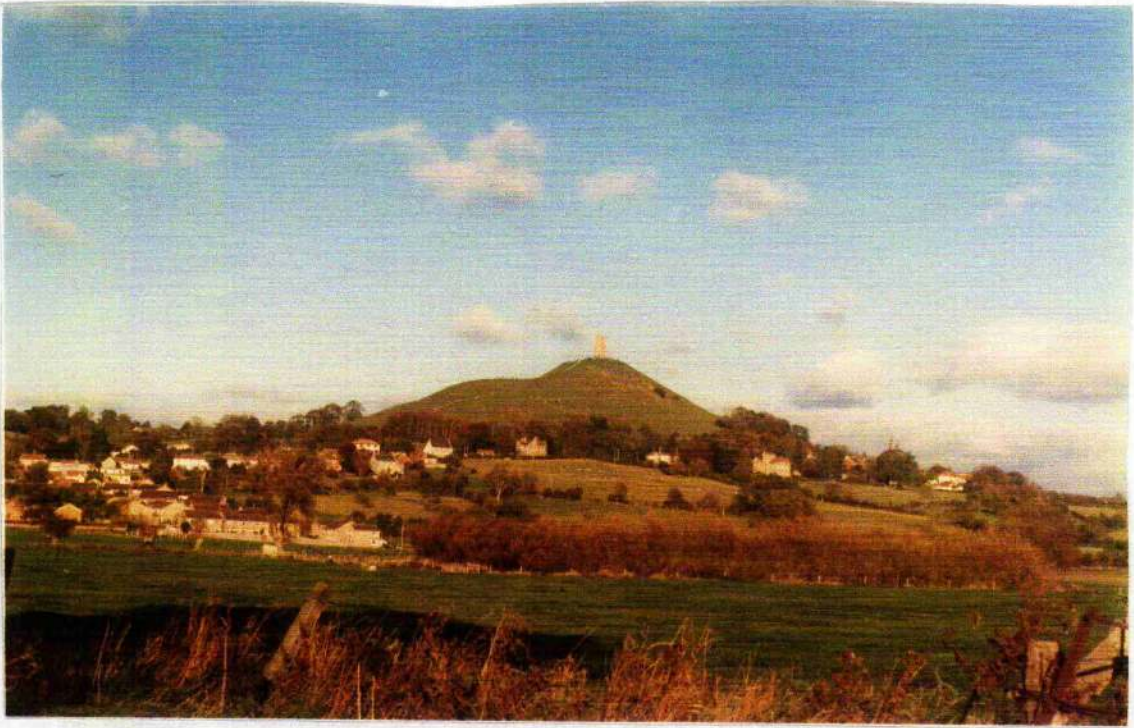
In contrast, finally, to balance the discussion of men and women, I refer back to the female healer who helps women to find their spiritual paths. I mentioned that this often led to the women leaving families and partners behind in their search to find their true selves. The following quote from a husband left behind shows the other perspective to the struggle for equality between the sexes in Glastonbury,

" Well I think men get a really bad deal in this sub-culture of ours. What do we do? We try really hard to work on equal relationships. But if a woman wants to leave the relationship in order to 'find herself', we are expected to stand out of her path and feel good for her. And if we say anything we are immediately accused of being oppressive and patriarchal. There is nothing we can do, we are just powerless."

In this section I have outlined attitudes to gender issues in Glastonbury. In the light of the ongoing discussion about individualism, it is clear that gender issues are secondary to the individual. It is important to remember that as a social group, the alternative community are largely very aware of feminist issues; some women lived in the women's peace protest at Greenham Common, and for many of the women, their decision to become involved with the New Age movement had meant leaving former roles as housewives. However, gender issues are largely played down, and feminism is often criticized as being 'divisive'. Instead, men are encouraged to 'find the feminine' inside themselves. I question how much these 'notions' have influenced gender roles from those of mainstream society, and conclude, very little.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I have looked at the areas of formal relations, resolution of conflict, and gender relations to exemplify how the notion of the individual is paramount in these three areas of day-to-day interaction in Glastonbury. At first sight these three areas may appear disconnected but I feel the notion of individualism in interaction remains consistent throughout. With roles and statuses, formal roles are deconstructed both in work and family situations, and the 'individual' takes precedence. In the resolution of conflict, with the notion of projection, personal responsibility is placed upon the individual for the conflict, in a manner similar to the personal responsibility placed upon the body in relation to health issues. Finally in gender relations people are ideologically viewed as individuals first and foremost, and gender barely second.



Chapter Seven

Individualism, Holism and Spirituality.

Introduction

"Is not religion all deeds and all reflections,
And that which is neither deed nor reflection,
but a wonder and a surprise ever springing in the
soul, even while the hands hew the stone or tend
the loom?

Who can separate his faith from his actions, or
his belief from his occupations?"¹

If it is possible to find a definitional characteristic from the plethora of religious notions in what constitutes 'New Age', the attempt to bring the spiritual into everyday living is one of them. The people I met emphasized over and over that, in their opinion, modern people had lost contact with an older and intrinsically spiritual part of themselves; from this loss stem, apparently, many of the problems of modern living. Again, returning to the theme of the outer reflecting the inner and the inner as influential on the world, it is seen as a natural logic in Glastonbury that issues such as the abuse of the environment and exploitation of people would not have occurred if people were still 'in touch' with spiritual values and the spiritual aspects of their own character.

As the above quotation from Kahlil Gibran suggests, such a spirituality must encompass all aspects of one's life. Just as the Shakers

¹ 'The Prophet', Kahlil Gibran. Pan edition, London. 1980. p.90.

taught 'Let every breath be a continual prayer to God', part of the purpose or motivation behind moving to Glastonbury and the alternative community which has evolved there, is to create a lifestyle in which one's spiritual beliefs are reflected in all parts of one's life; the 'religion is for Sundays' attitude sometimes associated with the Christian church is strongly criticized on this basis. In this respect Glastonbury is very similar to older religious communities like the Shakers and Hutterites, or, contemporarily, the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh community in Oregon. As one person in Glastonbury said,

'I have had these powerful experiences in my life which are really beyond words; indescribably sweet, just feeling myself bathed in interconnectedness to everything. Now I am trying to bring those experiences into the rest of my life and to find a way of being where I can operate in the world from a spiritual space and also enhance the opportunity for more of these intense revelatory experiences.'

Likewise one is encouraged to acknowledge the sacred aspect in everyday living; a section in 'Glastonbury Times' is called 'Holy Housework' and bears witness to this. Like the body, the home is seen as somewhere to be honoured and cherished. Some people take this one step further and see the 'household' as imbued with its own energy. When one person was looking round a prospective house to rent he said he felt the energy by the cooker as being the strongest point of the house. Others feel aware of the presence of spirits at nearly all times, as intimately connected with the moods and events of the house. One booklet advised on a ritual when moving to a new house to invoke the devas, or angels; the symbols of the 'four elements' were to be placed in the four corners

of the room, incense representing air, salt for earth, a candle for fire and a bowl of water for water,

"Today, one can still have an overshadowing angel who tends to the home's atmosphere, adjusting energies so as to aid a more attuned and beautiful life. A conscious effort, however, must be made to invoke the help and ongoing presence of an angel of this kind. First one must be aware for several weeks of one's intention to call such an angel to one's home. Second, one's home must be thoroughly cleaned. Then at a quiet and serene moment sit and light a candle for the angel. Remain quiet and sense that an angelic presence may come to the home."²

With the potential for angels and spirits around one at any time it is seen as important in Glastonbury to maintain a lifestyle and a way of being which is consistent with the 'spiritual energy' of everything around one, from trees, to people, to living spaces. It is on the basis of this belief that many people within the New Age movement hold in great esteem people who live in tribal societies, such as those who practise ancestor worship. Because people in tribal societies will say that the spirits of their ancestors are around them all the time, and even explain events in terms of spirits, 'New Agers' admire the 'spiritual consciousness' with which such people appear to live out their lives. Running the risk of romanticization, many people in Glastonbury commented that they felt people living in isolated 'tribal' societies maintained a connection with their spiritual selves which we, in the West, have lost.

² 'Devas, Fairies and Angels. A Modern Approach', William Bloom. Gothic Image Publications, Glastonbury. 1986. p.30.

In this chapter I propose that spirituality amongst the New Age movement in Glastonbury can most usefully be examined in terms of two complementary ideas; individualism and holism. Until this point in the thesis I have interpreted the ethnography in terms of the individualistic nature of beliefs and lifestyle in Glastonbury; in attitudes to work, health, child-rearing and social relations- in the more practical areas of life- individualism predominantly informs the alternative community in what they do. However holistic ideas have been mentioned as well; for example, ideas about energy reflected in attitudes to health and in social relations can be understood through ideas of inherent mutuality between people. But when we turn to what might be called people's 'general contemplation of life', where notions of spirituality predominate, elements of holism become especially strong. I contend that such ideas of holism act as a complement to individualism and predominantly serve the important function of community building.

It is true that I never heard people articulate ideas quite this way during my fieldwork. However individualism and holism are two categories they would recognize separately and to speak of them as complements certainly makes sense of many things people say and do [for further discussion see the next chapter].

To introduce the complementary nature of individualism and holism in the context of Glastonbury, I describe a case study which, I believe, highlights how these two elements work interrelate. The case study is based upon a group of friends, and friends of friends, who had talked of forming some kind of spiritual community that would meet on a regular basis to share spiritual experiences in a stable social environment. The impetus to form such a group came from mainly two sources; people who had been involved before in specific religious groups or practices and decided to leave, and people who were having children and wanted

to bring them up in some kind of spiritual community but did not feel sufficiently sympathetic to the views of the church to have their child baptized and to become regular church-goers [some of the people belonged to both groups]. The idea had been discussed for many months and there was a feeling of consensus about what people wanted. Eventually a meeting was arranged to discuss these matters further and try to sort out a kind of procedure and pattern for the meetings to follow. Before the meeting one of the members of the group explained it to me as a group of people looking for a sense of family,

"You know what it's like, when you meet some people it's as if you know them immediately. There's some kind of commonness there, this is just a group of people getting together to explore this."

However at the meeting it became clear quickly that people had very different expectations. When people were discussing what they wanted differences arose over whether the group was an opened or closed group; some felt they wanted to develop a group where they knew who was going to be there and could feel comfortable to open up, whereas others felt that the whole point was to go beyond the level of personality, to recognize the communality of humans and that sometimes one could have one's most powerful experiences with a total stranger. Another point of contention was over children; some people felt that perhaps at some times in the meeting it was more appropriate to have children around than at other times, whereas others [particularly the parents] felt it was appropriate to have children there at all times. Eventually it was suggested that we played some games so that people became more relaxed with each other. However, a series of polarities had dominated the evening.

I also attended the next meeting the following week. Some of the people from the previous week were missing, notably the two sets of parents. In both meetings there had been a continual sense of awkwardness about how to proceed; people were trying to 'evolve' a procedure and although a number of people had experience in co-ordinating groups, they were hesitant to impose their ideas on the rest of the group. With the shrink in numbers in the second week, people played 'trust-building' games and then sat around talking. During the course of the evening the conversation turned to the fact that nearly all the people present had been involved in either a new religious movement, or a more traditional one, or had followed closely the teachings of one particular teacher. People talked about how they had felt too confined in one group, how they had felt compelled to take on a whole body of beliefs, not all of which could they accept; they had felt their individuality threatened, and preferred now to take from diverse teachings, as they pleased. Jokingly at first, one person suggested that that was what they all had in common; a mutual dissatisfaction with teachers, 'the guru syndrome', and the discipline of the group. Soon everyone was exchanging their experiences on this theme., and deciding that what they had in common was their reluctance to embrace 'one faith' and jeopardize their individuality by doing so.

The group continued from this for a number of weeks, in a similar routine of playing trust games and 'sharing'. However, it slowly became smaller and more irregular. It certainly never became a 'spiritual community'.

In this case study we see the juxtaposition of two ideals; the desire for 'community' with an emphasis upon shared understanding, connectedness and a sense of family, and the strong individualist ethos. It could be described as a microcosmic example of the continuing dialogue

in New Age thinking between the holism of the group/community and the emphasis upon the autonomy of the self. Here when the two elements came into contact there was conflict; however a number of other factors have to be taken into account such as group dynamics, different expectations and misunderstandings. In general the two ideas can co-exist harmoniously; indeed the logic of an extreme individualism is that there could be no 'alternative community' in Glastonbury. A holistic complement is thus implied.

I now proceed to look at individualism and holism in turn.

Individualism and Spirituality

i) Spirituality and the self.

'No one can know God who has not first known himself.
Go to the depths of the soul, the secret place
...to the roots, to the heights; for all that God can do
is focussed there.'³

As with many aspects of New Age belief, the inner self in spirituality is the initial point of focus. This is for two reasons; firstly, one must first work on the inner as a precursor to trying to influence the outside world, and, secondly, the inner is a reflection of the sacred inside each person. I intend to look at both these elements in turn.

³ Meister Eckhart, translated by Raymond Blackney. From 'The Aquarian Conspiracy. Personal and Social Transformation in our Time', by Marilyn Ferguson. J.P. Tarcher, Los Angeles. 1980. p.382.

'Start from within'

One person in Glastonbury said of the New Age,

"I associate it with the period of time following the Harmonic Convergence. Before everyone was dreaming death and now we are dreaming life. There is a new ecological vision where we are suffering from an environmental sickness or cancer. Ecologists focus on the outer rather than the inner, but change needs to come from the inside to the outer. You have to look for solutions inside yourself and then start taking responsibility."

Here we see clearly articulated the notion of taking responsibility for oneself and changing oneself before concentrating upon the 'outer' world. As the personal transformation process, which most people in the alternative community have undergone, is partially about developing a spiritual awareness of being, it follows that this process is an intrinsically spiritually oriented process; therapy and spirituality become mixed and it is difficult to differentiate between the two.

One centre in Glastonbury, 'Shambhala', tells in its advertising literature how it creates a space for people to come 'with trust' to get to the heart of their spiritual malaise for the healing process to begin. Such a spiritual malaise, they believe, is caused by a lack of love in humanity which they feel they counter-balance,

"You have always been part of Shambhala by loving yourself. You have always been in the heart. This Trust is to remind you of this. There are many who suffer on this planet, many thousands who are unhappy and many millions who are lonely and confused. These are but the symptoms of the disease. A disease caused at its very roots by the lack of love within humanity and it is only by

working at the root cause that any lasting change takes place. The Trust acts like a sword to clearly cut through illusion. It acts like a cradle to catch you in moments of distress and in your darkest hour. It acts like a catalyst and a signpost to activate and guide you back to your home in the heart. For this is the centre of love and this is the centre of peace. If the soul does not have this nourishment, it will wither and die."⁴

In such an environment, it is suggested, the person will be able to relax and let go of a lot of their fears, experience their true selves and climb back onto the path of spiritual well-being. Such an experience is claimed to change their perception of the world. To even make the analytical distinction between spirituality and self runs the risk of misrepresenting the actor's views, for the two are seen as interdependent.

'The sacred within..'

The inner self is often seen as a reflection of the divine element that is in each individual and this is often discussed, both in the literature and by people I talked to, in terms of differing levels of self. In one publication a woman describes the different levels of being that she becomes aware of during moments of heightened spiritual consciousness.

"At such times I am aware of myself - flesh and blood, heart and still. It is as if an 'inner observer', or higher intelligence, surfaces out of my usual unconscious activity, expands my awareness,

⁴ Shambhala Charitable Trust, introductory literature, Coursing Batch, Glastonbury.

sharpens the listening ear and enables me to witness my everyday reactions with a benign indifference."⁵

Whether it is enshrined as 'higher intelligence', 'higher self', 'inner teacher' or 'God-within' the different levels of self within each individual are basically physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. It is believed that among different social groups in society different emphases are placed upon these aspects, and where there is an unequal balance of the levels the individual is put 'out of balance'. For example, people were critical of the academic community on the basis that they place too much weight on the mental and not enough on the emotional or intuitive; people who became very wrapped up in the spiritual and paid little attention to the physical or mental were accused of being 'ungrounded'. A balance of all these elements must be reached to find harmony. Gabrielle Roth, who calls herself an 'urban shaman' argues that it is only in such conditions that the soul makes itself manifest,

"When the body, the heart and the mind are in unity, when we are thinking, feeling and doing as one action, then the soul can manifest. The soul can only manifest through unity, it cannot manifest through contradiction or separation. Normally we're walking around in a state of what I call 'trizophrenia', where we're thinking one thing, feeling another and doing a third. Each of us needs to feel that state of power, that unity, that 'yes', that totality of Body, Mind, Heart, Soul and Spirit."⁶

⁵ 'My Body is the Wind-The Call to Non-Separation', Chloe Goodchild. *Kindred Spirit*. vol.1 no.12. 1990. p.12

⁶ 'Gabrielle Roth. On the Path of the Urban Shaman', interview with Patricia Yates. *Kindred Spirit*. Winter 1990/91.

Thus, the spirit or soul is seen here to constitute one part of the individual on a scale of different levels. At the same time the individual as a whole is seen as intrinsically spiritual.

ii] The Individuality of the Soul

The soul of an individual is viewed by many people as something which existed before their birth in another form and which will continue in another form after their death. The soul is not often seen as subject to any higher control or deity; it is part of the 'lifeforce' which exists in every animate being. Usually the supposed 'other forms' are in other human bodies but souls can also exist as disincarnate spirits. Although the soul is seen as distinct from the personality some individuals are able to recall memories and experiences from their past lives. A therapy, 'regression', exists to help people relive their past life experiences which might have left a negative impression and be hampering them in the present life. In this section I wish to take three different examples with case studies, to exemplify the intrinsically individualistically-viewed nature of the soul.

a] Death

"To die is different from
What anyone supposes
And luckier."

Walt Whitman

"You have squeezed yourself into the time span of a lifetime and the volume of a body, and thus created the innumerable conflicts of life and death. Have your being outside this body of birth and death, and all your problems will be solved. They existed because

you believe yourself born to die. Undeceive yourself and be free.
You are not a person.'

Nisargadetta Maharaj⁷

When the Physical Immortalists proclaiming 'the Christing of the flesh' in the physical survival of the body, it might appear that the alternative community in Glastonbury and the New Age movement as a whole are not particularly 'into' death. On the contrary, many people see death as part of nature's cycle, and part of their own cycle of reincarnation. Thus, courses were run in the locality to promote a loving acceptance of death. The facilitator of these courses felt that many people's lives were inhibited by the fear of death or bereavement. In the discussions I had with people about death, ideas about the human soul became evident; for many the human soul persists in an individual form. One person commented,

"When I die I can visualize myself going towards a bright and warm white light and all my fears and worries drop away; I can leave that all behind and join my mother on the other side. She is standing there waiting for me and smiling."

I have chosen to focus upon an article by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross to exemplify some ideas about death. In doing so, I acknowledge that her ideas and work go far beyond the New Age movement as such, and into modern medical practice. However in Glastonbury these ideas are widely known and discussed, within the cultural framework of the alternative community. Kubler-Ross has worked with the terminally ill for more than 30 years and, mostly recently, with people suffering from AIDS. She is a

⁷ 'Grim Reaper or Happy Harvester?' Selection of quotations on death from The Manna House, Greinton, Somerset, England.

medical practitioner who also gives strong weight to 'out of body' spiritual experiences. In this article she uses as examples the often very clear and unskeptical thinking of children as evidence of how the individual soul passes onto the spiritual realm,

"We have had children mention next-of-kin who died ten minutes earlier miles and miles away, and we have never had a mistake. Many times, I would say almost all the time, children who die slowly are given a glimpse of what its going to be like. Once they have experienced and seen that, they are no longer afraid. Anyone who has seen the light, whether it's an out -of-body or near-death experience, will never again be afraid of death, it is not possible once you have been in that spiritual realm."⁸

In the above account, in the poems and in the informants' statement quoted above, a common notion emerges; the individual has a soul with a consciousness beyond the physical body. In its individual consciousness the soul maintains memories from previous lifetimes and recognizes relationships, for example with dead parents, after that lifetime is over. In death the soul is an individual entity which persists. As such, the individual having such a soul, is honoured as a separate entity, part of which, in the soul, is indeed immortal.

b) Channelling

Not only does the soul continue on independently of the physical body and build up a memory, it is also possible for disincarnate spirits, or souls to exist in the atmosphere, and to enter the body of a living

⁸ 'Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Interview'. Part Two. 'Kindred Spirit', spring 1990. p.34.

individual. The spirit 'takes over' the body of the living individual with its personality. Such a process is called channelling and the body through which the spirits' message is communicated is called a 'channeller'.

Channelling appears to be becoming more and more common; this is explained in the alternative community both in terms of people jumping on the bandwagon, and also of an increasingly accepting atmosphere so people feel confident to come forward and announce themselves as channellers. In Glastonbury a number of people felt themselves to be channels, and also, many channellers came to Glastonbury to give 'channelling' to groups of people. Who becomes a channel is also a highly individualistic matter, who finds themselves to 'be' a channel, and the character the disincarnate entity assumes. Indeed, much channelling literature starts with the ubiquitous 'This is the last thing I ever expected to happen to me, I was leading an ordinary life...' One channeller in Glastonbury described to me how she had always been interested in psychic phenomenon since she took up yoga in her early twenties. Then, about two years prior to our conversation, she had been in Spain on holiday and had had the experience of the spirit of one of Jesus' disciples entering into her. At the time she had been feeling emotionally upset after an argument with her lover, and said she felt as if her own soul had been taken away for healing while another stepped in. Apparently her voice had changed from her normal tone to a deep gruff and masculine manner, and her hand and face gestures altered accordingly. Since this event the woman has channelled regularly. She said "Being channelled through is like having a torch shone on your third eye.". People come to her for advice through channelling which she does in person, through tapes, and is even able to spontaneously channel over the telephone. She fasts regularly and tries to eat raw foods. She said it was very important for her to be as pure as possible in her lifestyle and

consequently could not sleep with a man who was not himself undergoing purification. If resistance is lowered, she told me, it is possible for a 'walk in' to occur where another lower form of soul enters her body and takes her over. She described to me how an amoeba-like entity had entered her after she had drunk a pint of cider, and it was a few uncomfortable hours before the lower being left her body.

Another experience of channelling I had during my fieldwork was a public channelling in the 'Georges Rooms' of the Glastonbury Experience. A long airy room with big windows and a visionary, many-coloured painting of the Tor at one end, it held about thirty people who had paid £5 or £3, depending on their income, who were here to welcome the Reverend Joy Ballas-Beeson of New Thought Science, Boulder, Colorado. She channelled the apostle 'Bartholomew'. However she was quick to mention that she was not the only one to channel Bartholomew; a man in Florida received him, in addition to an employee of the Pentagon who has since changed his name to Brother Snowflake. Joy Ballas-Beeson said she had always been interested in psychic phenomena since childhood but it was only later in adulthood following a divorce, losing her job and developing rheumatic arthritis that she had fully 'surrendered to the Spirit'. After introducing herself and her background, she paused for a moment, dropped her head, closed her eyes, and then looked up and began to channel Bartholomew. 'Bartholomew' took the audience through a guided meditation, focusing upon throwing one's negative thoughts into the purple flame. 'He' said that this meditation method was originally only available to masters who chose to take form on Earth without incarnation. Since the Harmonic Convergence however, it had become available to all light-bearers. A question and answer session followed, after which the spirit of Bartholomew left and Reverend Joy Ballas-Beeson returned.

In channelling we once again see how the 'Soul' or 'Spirit', which constitutes the most important element of a person, is an individual entity which continues through many lifetimes and can even influence and communicate with the larger world by entering into a medium's body; a form of 'spirit possession'

c) Regression and Rebirthing

"At the moment of your birth, you formed impressions about the world which you have carried all your life; these impressions control you from a subconscious level. Many of them are negative:

Life is a struggle.

The Universe is a hostile place.

The Universe is against me.

I can't get what I need.

People hurt me.

There must be something wrong with me.

Life is painful.

Love is dangerous.

I am not wanted.

I can't get enough love'.⁹

According to 'rebirthers' such as Leonard Orr, the moment of birth is for the most part hostile and traumatic. In California Leonard Orr developed a technique involving a snorkel, a noseplug and a tub of water in which the rebirthee floated face down in order to re-stimulate the initial birth

⁹ Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray 'Rebirthing'. Page 141 from William Bloom ed. The New Age.

experience and to re-live it in a positive way to remove the association with trauma. This technique has later been modified for the most part into a series of breathing exercises without the water called 'dry re-birthing'.

Although re-birthing was initially concerned with birth, it is also used to stimulate people into memories of their past lives. One person told me about a visit she paid to a rebirther which was not particularly successful in her opinion.

"I lay on the floor and Sarah told me to breathe in and out regularly, then quite fast and then to stop. Then I was told to start again. Eventually this was meant to take me into a remembrance of a past life or some other event which is acting as a block in me, Sarah told me to let it out and experience it. It didn't really do very much for me; I even noticed Sarah writing in her notes 'finds it hard to let go'. She backed up the session however by giving me lots of affirmations including one about physical immortalism'.

However another person I talked to in Glastonbury had a more powerful experience:

"I was doing my breathing exercises when I was taken back to another life where I was in a church being raped by a group of monks, these men were taking away my power. To me they represented my father, my boyfriend etc. Then suddenly I rose up onto the crucifying cross of Christ and became like a female Christ. My stomach swelled up like a pregnant woman. The men below were overcome and gave me my power back."

One of the common criticisms about past-life experiences from people outside of the New Age community is "How come people always find out in regression classes that they were Egyptian Princes, or raped

by Italian Saints or Tudor Kings? Why aren't people ever serving maids or English peasants?" This was explained to me by one rebirther who said that when people remember things in one lifetime they retain important spectacular events, not the mundane details of domestic living; correspondingly, when one recalls past lives one recalls the ones which had the most impact.

Past lives is particularly interesting because it reinforces the idea of an enduring and individual soul which perpetuates beyond the lifetime of the body. With the idea of past lives is also carried that of reincarnation. In 'Dancing in the Light', the account of Shirley Maclaine's life and spiritual experiences, she recalls a conversation with her healer and past-life therapist, Chris Griscon, who is explaining how a soul consciously chooses which body it wants to enter and thus has responsibility for its fate.

"If we taught our children that they choose us as parents, the child would learn early on to take more responsibility for its fate. That is why enlightenment is so crucial. We are not operating with enough knowledge in our society. This way the child either gives up because of the authority he experiences, or because he becomes rebellious. But his soul intuitively knows that he can't legitimately blame the parents for his situation, whatever it might be. A damaged child CHOSE to experience that ¹⁰

Shirley Maclaine writes in long and vivid detail about her experiences tracing her past lives, to explain conflicts and personality patterns in her present life. She does so with the aid of spirit guides in the room,

¹⁰ 'Dancing In the Light', Shirley Maclaine. Bantam Press, Reading. 1986. page 307

"I shut my eyes again. The crashing storm persisted.

Why was I seeing this?

"Ask your higher self why its showing you this image" commanded
Chris

I did. Instantly I got back: "Because you had mastered the knowledge of weather control in this particular incarnation, but abused your power, you were insensitive to the consequences of your manipulation". The words came in English but it was the thought behind the words that I felt more deeply. I had mastered the knowledge of weather control?

My conscious mind raced to my appreciation of wild and stormy weather conditions today. To be in the centre of crashing lightning, rolling thunder, and pelting rain gave me as much pleasure as anything I could think of. Could this feeling be related to a former existence?¹¹

Conclusion

In these three examples of death and the soul, channelling, and regression I have tried to show how, in New Age thought, the soul/spirit is conceptualized as an individual entity which continues to exist beyond the lifetime of one body; it's experiences in previous bodies also influence the present. This is a wide topic, subject to individual interpretation, and my understanding tended to change as I talked to different people. However in showing these roots of the concern with the self and 'the spirit', I have tried to exemplify the values of individualism which that are so central to the New Age belief system. Central to these three examples are such notions of 'choosing one's fate' through the soul, as

¹¹ *ibid* 10, page 317

well as taking responsibility for one's life, or 'owning it' in New Age terminology. I now wish to turn to the complement of such a philosophy, holism.

Holism and Spirituality

Definition of holism,

"tendency in nature to form wholes that are more than the sum of the parts by ordered grouping".¹²

In contrast to the ethos of individualism, there are also strong holistic elements in the value system of the alternative community, which I believe importantly constitute community building structures. To understand the connection between holism and community it is useful to invoke Victor Turner, and the notion of *communitas*.¹³ Many people have tried to characterize *communitas*; it is sometimes described as a movement away from the rationality of the structured intellect to that of intuitive behaviour, as a transformation from individual to group experience, and away from the roles of everyday behaviour. Such notions have perhaps previously been evoked most effectively by poets rather than by social scientists. T.S. Eliot spoke of an "inner freedom from practical desire"¹⁴ and William Blake describes "being mutual in love divine"¹⁵ More recently, Allen Ginsberg wrote of 'angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the

¹² Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1976 edition.

¹³ 'The Ritual Process', Victor Turner. 1969. Rutledge & Kegan Paul, London

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot 'Burnt Norton-Four Quartets' Faber & Faber, London.

¹⁵ "Jerusalem" William Blake. Plate 4

machinery of night'.¹⁶ For his part Turner describes *communitas* as that moment in a party or a pilgrimage or a ritual or a football match when one ceases to be aware of oneself as an individual entity. Substituting 'community' for 'communitas', Martin Buber eloquently describes such a sense of personal freedom,

"Community is the being no longer side by side but with one another, but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou. Community is where community happens."¹⁷

The alternative community in Glastonbury has evolved in a way consistent with a desire to make the spiritual experience an inherent part of one's everyday life. It constitutes a movement of people, with a common overall goal, who wish to put aside some of the roles and social distinctions of mainstream society to build a society where people are known by their individual personality rather than their job. People wanted to create a lifestyle which would enhance and facilitate the opportunities for spiritual experience. Turner calls this routinization, 'ideological *communitas*'.¹⁸ Once I explained to one of my informants Turner's notions of *communitas*. He nodded slowly, looked up at me, and said "Ideological *communitas* - that's where I live."

In New Age ideology the notions of holism invoked through Gaia theory, rituals, and notions of common essence are, I believe, integrally linked to Turner's notions of *communitas*. Like *communitas*, in these

¹⁶ 'Howl and other poems', Allen Ginsberg. The pocket Poet Series. City Light Books, San Francisco.

¹⁷ 'I and Thou', Martin Buber, translated Ronald Gregor Smith. T&T Clark, Edinburgh, p.51

¹⁸ *ibid* 13

examples of holism we see notions of a social commonality. These notions are integral to the building of community amongst the alternative community in Glastonbury.

Gaia

"The result of this more single-minded approach was the development of the hypothesis that the entire range of living matter on earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts."¹⁹

The quotation is from James Lovelock's essentially scientific theory that the planet Earth can be viewed as an independent living organism. Naming his theory 'Gaia' after the Greek Earth Goddess, he drew an unexpected crowd of supporters: the New Age movement. With its comparison of the human race to a nervous or communication system it was hailed by many people in the movement as science recognizing the integral interconnectedness of all life. The theory seemed to recognize the earth as having a consciousness, as being alive. At a night-time vigil on the Tor during the Harmonic Convergence of 1987, one man who lived in a tent in the woods explained to me how he felt about 'Gaia',

"When I look up at the sky now and see the stars twinkling, I feel the aliveness of the earth, I can feel her breathing. We are part of

¹⁹ 'Gaia', James Lovelock, from "The New Age" ed. William Bloom. Channel 4 Book, 1991. p.166.

it all, we are the communication system of Gaia's body. When I realized that I knew it didn't matter who I was or where I was, I knew I could never feel lonely."

Other people saw the problems facing the human race today as caused by our misplaced arrogance towards the earth,

"Our ability to be objective, to see ourselves as the 'I' or 'eye' of our cosmos, as beings independent of nature, has inflated our egos - 'ego' being the Greek word for 'I'. We came to separate the 'I' from the 'it' and to believe that 'it' - the world 'out there' - was ours to do as we pleased, telling ourselves we were either God's favoured children or the smartest and most powerful naturally evolved creatures on Earth. This egotistic attitude has been very much a factor in bringing us to adolescent crisis. And so an attitude of greater humility and willingness to accept some guidance from our parent planet will be an important factor in reaching our species maturity."²⁰

It is the idea of wholeness, interdependence and of interconnectedness of nature that has influenced many New Age ideas; indeed, the Gaia hypothesis has been adopted as the symbol of a holistic vision. However there is one crucial difference between the New Age ideas about the 'parent planet' and Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis; Lovelock does not attribute a consciousness to the earth as an intelligent being. Many people I met attributed a moral quality of 'goodness' to nature. After a violent storm where a number of trees were blown down one woman said "it's a message, she's expelling herself at the roots, the fallen

²⁰ 'Gaia's Dance', Elizabeth Sahtouris, from 'The New Age', ed. William Bloom. Channel 4 Book 1991. p.169.

trees are there to teach us a lesson. " As Michael Allaby writes in 'A Guide to Gaia', such an interpretation is misleading,

"Sentience, the possession of senses, suggests some level of awareness, and awareness suggests consciousness. Gaia begins to resemble an intelligent being.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that given a very brief and simplified outline of this new view of the way the planet works, together with a name to attach to it, that some people may come to regard Gaia as a god. Not only is this incorrect, it is potentially harmful. The apparently persuasive line of reasoning that leads to this interpretation is false. Gaia, or the Earth, is not intelligent, does not think, and most emphatically is not a god. To this extent the name Gaia is perhaps unfortunate."²¹

However much scientists and ecologists may sigh and bow their heads at the misrepresentation of 'their' theory, it has become an integral part of the New Age belief system. The Earth is one big organism of which we, as human beings, are a part, and play an important function. According to informants, it serves to further the idea that human beings have a role and connection in relation to each other beyond our individual needs and perceptions. This is consistent with the notion of *communitas* which I described earlier.

Notion of Common Essence.

Linked to the holistic vision of the human race's connection to Gaia, is a parallel sense of common essence between all living forms,

²¹ 'A Guide to Gaia. A Survey of the New Science of our Living Earth', Michael Allaby. E.P. Dutton, New York. 1989. p.111.

particularly human beings. Despite a large part of the belief system centering round answering people's needs as separate individuals, a corresponding weight is placed upon a holistic vision of a 'spirit' common to all. Sometimes this is expressed in terms of a common divinity and at other times in terms of a higher or common self which the individual usually suppresses from expressing. At this level separation is seen as illusion, and a movement away from the 'truth' or 'spirit'.

"A mind that conceives of itself as fundamentally separate from all that it perceives is an instrument of division. It can do nothing but divide, analyze, compartmentalize, and dissect. Everything on which it turns its attention is reduced to disconnected segments, while the spirit, the life of the whole, is forgotten. With the fictitious premise that it is fundamentally distinct from both 'others' and nature lying at the root of its thinking, the ego is not capable of reason, for its premise is a lie."²²

According to Ken Carey, the 'lonely ego' is isolated and lacks the strength and power of the spirit, or truth. He continues to produce the statistic 'Without the spirit, the ego is capable of using only about ten percent of the brain's capacity'. The spirit is what is common to all, and what links all to all.

One of the strongest and most famous proponents of such a theory is Sir George Trevelyan, who founded the Wrekin Trust. He is a regular visitor to Glastonbury and has close contacts with people there, participating in many events as well as giving lectures. During my pilot study in Glastonbury over the period of the Harmonic Convergence in 1987, I met Sir George a number of times; a tall, craggy man with

²² 'Instinctual Living- The Path Beyond Language', Ken Carey. Global Link Up. April/May 1991.

piercing and bright blue eyes; his agility, charisma and vivid, sweeping gestures belied his older years. The thrust of his teaching lies in people becoming more aware of the oneness of life, to realize that each of us as individuals are part of a wider life force. He said that at present he feels mankind is divided with people separated off, one from the other, in a manner similar to the Ancient Mariner 'and no one told pity on my soul in misery'; through the awareness of the oneness of all life it is possible to move beyond the transitory states of personality. He writes,

"This consciousness includes the capacity to be one with any other human being. Normally you and I experience separation: we are separate beings, which is the essence of Newtonian thinking. When I look into your eyes, however, I realize that it isn't just two chaps. The divinity in me is the same as the divinity in you. Obviously: the holistic viewpoint implies it. I can look through your eyes and it is the divinity in me looking at itself through you. In this sense we are one."²³

Sir George practises a ritual which he describes as an experiment to exemplify these ideas. As one of the 'helpers' of the 'World Healing Event' in Glastonbury in 1987 I participated in it. He told us to stare into someone's eyes and look beyond the outer faces of personality so one didn't feel the need to visually respond to that level of communication. At that point what you saw in someone's eyes was the same thing and part of the same whole as yourself; that which you see and that which is in yourself is a little droplet of divinity. When I participated in the ritual it was to welcome the 'energies' of Sun Ray which were coming down to earth. Firstly ten of us stood round an oak tree holding hands to give

²³ 'Summons To A High Crusade', Sir George Trevelyan. The Findhorn Press, Forres. 1986. p.15-16.

thanks, some of us with flowers to celebrate nature. Then we moved to a circular rose garden to 'appreciate the beauty of creation'. At that point we branched into pairs and me, the participating observer, found myself staring into the eyes of Sir George himself. We were to look into the soul in each other and then say 'I wish you the beauty of the rose and the strength of the oak'. Then he gave me the Essene blessing by putting his hand on my cheek and saying 'Blessings be with you' and I replied 'And with you'. Then we exchanged a hug.

Once again we see the holistic principle of connectedness between people, a commonness on the basis of something larger than the individual. With each ritual the *communitas* moment is re-lived and re-enforced.

Rituals of Communality

Ritual plays an important role in the alternative community in Glastonbury. It was particularly pronounced around the period of the pilot study in 1987 which was based upon the organization of a large ritual event, the Harmonic Convergence; this was consistent with the large numbers of people gathering together to celebrate. However during the period of main fieldwork I observed that ritual acts were common in everyday living such as singing grace before a meal. I propose that the purpose behind these acts is to maintain a sense of community in Glastonbury, to consciously build upon its symbolic construction in relation to the outside community, and to share a holistic vision. In this section I intend to describe a number of case studies in order to exemplify this. I have selected case studies from as diverse an area as possible, some very short and some longer, in order to show the wide range of ritual.

a] The first group is a meditation and healing group. Although meditation is often seen as an individual experience, in Glastonbury people often come together, meditate together and 'share the energy'. A meditation group is seen as something holistic; the energy generated from the individual participants can gell together and be more than just a sum of its parts.

The meditation began by people entering the room and finding somewhere to sit around the outside of the room. People picked up cushions and either sat cross-legged on the floor or on chairs. In the centre of the room was a candle and a bunch of flowers. The leader of the meditation sat at one end and people chatted quietly amongst themselves until the meeting began. The leader welcomed people who had not been before; people were invited to go round the circle and introduce themselves. He then started to talk about how the energy is building up in the world and cited the end of the Berlin Wall and the revolutions in Eastern Europe as examples. He said we were lucky to be in Glastonbury because that was the 'heart chakra' of the energy and it was getting more and more powerful. He then began a guided meditation. Everyone was told to breathe in the light that was coming down, to fill their bodies with white light, and then to start passing the energy from left to right , to receive it from the neighbour on their left and to pass it on to the neighbour on their right. Then with our 'out breaths' we were to breathe out the light and form a common pillar of white light in the centre of the room. The pillar of white light was described as infinite, 'in the way we all are'. This was followed by twenty minutes of individual meditation and then three 'oommms' which were called 'earthing' sounds to 'ground' the light and bring the session to an end. When I opened my eyes a woman was sitting in the centre of the room, holding a crystal. Crystals constitute an important part of ritual as they are believed to receive and

transmit 'pure' waves of energy. Unlike the soul, energy represents a power beyond people and is available for people to harness. Luhrmann describes similar 'currents' which the magicians elicit and direct in her study of contemporary witchcraft in London.²⁴

b] A Christmas party - after performing a number of circle dances and other games, a candle was lit in the centre of the room and all the lights were turned off. The only other form of light in the room was an open fire crackling in the background. Twelve of us sat cross-legged in the centre of the room around the candle. Some music was put on and we were told by the person leading the ritual to start singing 'how I love you, how I love you' along to the tune. At first we were to sing all together and then look at each other person in the group in turn, stare deep into their eyes, and sing this to that other person, and continue until we had sung it to every person in the group in turn.

c] Lunar Meditation - when I entered people were already sitting in a circle with a candle and incense in the centre, in silent individual meditation. When a number of people had entered the leader began a guided meditation. Like the cycles of the moon he suggested striving towards one goal and then as you reach it, striving towards the next. He told us to let the light and peace fill our bodies, and then let it out into the world; north, east, south, west, up and down. In front of us on pieces of card was 'The Great Invocation' which we read out together,

" From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let light descend on earth.

²⁴ 'Persuasions of the Witch's Craft. Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present Day England', T.M. Luhrmann. 1989. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. p.115-6

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
 Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
 May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
 Let purpose guide the little wills of men -
 The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
 Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
 And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

d] The Aquarian Cross - a golden cross was brought from Jerusalem to Glastonbury because of a spiritual message that had been received. The cross was carried in procession from Wearyall Hill to the Tor, and was received by a large crowd at the top of the Tor. A blessing ceremony on a couple was also taking place. Four people dressed in white held the cross in the centre and then people began to chant ,

'To you I give
 From you I receive,
 In this we share.'

They turned to the person next to them and repeated the vows to their neighbours, and then exchanged a hug. Following this a group of people started playing the bongos and guitar, chanting,

'We are from the Goddess,
 Unto her we shall return,

Like a drop in the ocean...

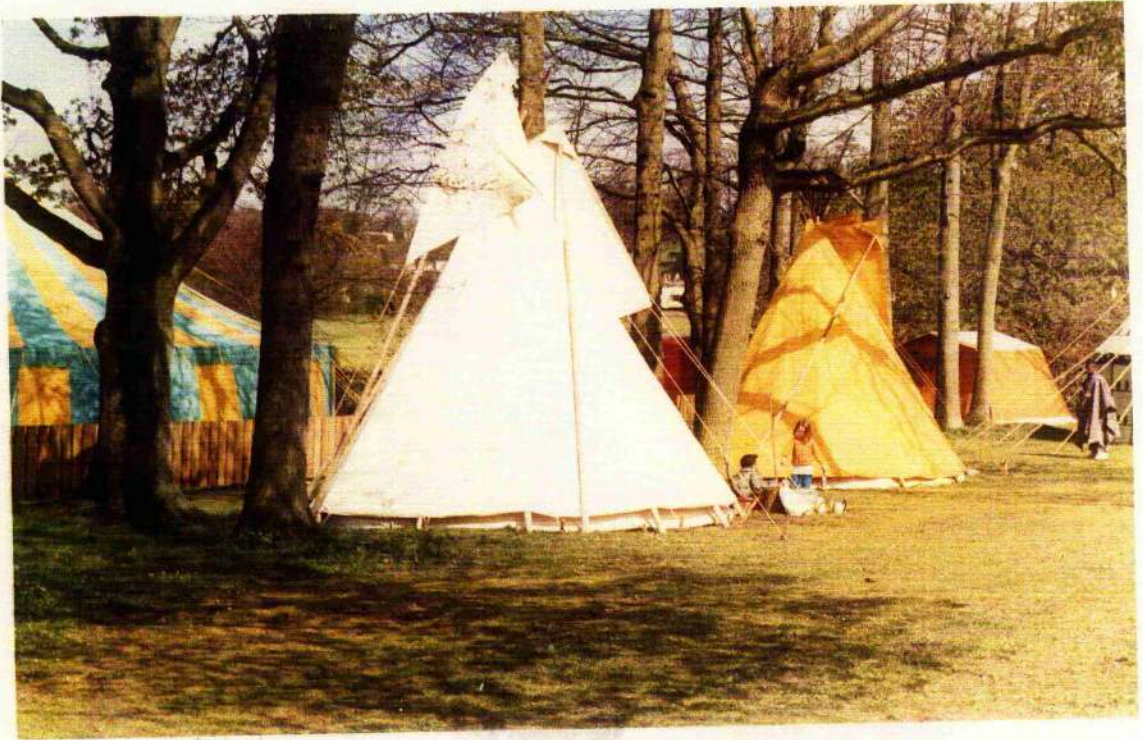
e] At the house where we lived, retreats were run regularly. Over the Christmas period, which was an extended retreat, a gong would be hit twice a day in invite people to come and share a period of silent sharing and meditation.

These rituals differ in form, substance and context. In some people remain quite physically separate and the contact is one of 'energy', as in the first example. Again we see here the theme of common essence; the energy one person receives can be passed onto the next. Furthermore, as a group one can create energy that can be manipulated and controlled. At the end of some of these particular series of meditations, the 'light' would often be sent out over the whole of Glastonbury. However in both the example of the Aquarian Cross and the Christmas party, people had direct contact with each other, and the essence of the ritual lay in two individuals sharing something in face to face contact. Despite these differences a common theme is maintained; communality and holism. By the very nature of ritual, a bond is created between the people participating in. In the alternative community in Glastonbury such a bond is aimed at creating a sense of common essence firstly with its fellow participants and members, and secondly, with the whole of mankind.

Conclusion

In this section, 'holism and spirituality', I have tried to show how ideas of holism are invoked in the alternative community. Such ideas predominate particularly when one turns one's attention to notions of community; 'community' of the planet with the Gaia theory, or with the notions of commonality between individuals. I link such ideas of

'commonness' to Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, and argue that holistic principles constitute important community building structures in Glastonbury.



Chapter Eight

Analytical Commentary.

Glastonbury is a place where people come to live out their fantasies.

Tom, musician, age 30.

Much of the ethnography of this thesis is presented as ideas; in the form of extracts from speeches, rituals and magazines, and informants' statements. I have treated the ethnography under the two themes of 'individualism' and 'holism', presenting them as the two foremost principles underlying the philosophy of the alternative community in Glastonbury. This has two immediate implications. Firstly, 'individualism' and 'holism' are analytical distinctions. They represent my interpretation of the idea system of the alternative community. Any attempt to describe the New Age passes through the smokescreen of my own interpretation. As such, as Nigel Rapport writes, "it is a traveller's tale and it is subjective."¹ It is true that the terms 'individualism' and 'holism' form part of the actor's vocabulary [for example, when they refer to 'Gaia', holism is clearly in mind, and when they speak of 'self-development' it is individualism]. However they do not cast their philosophy of life into two such analytical categories. Secondly, individualism and holism are analytical terms which describe predominantly idea systems. Although this might appear to raise the anthropological debate of whether people use ideology to justify actions, or vice versa, I justify my concern with notions precisely on the basis that I am describing the mode of social life

¹ 'Talking Violence. An Anthropological Interpretation of Conversation in the City', Nigel Rapport. Institute of Social and Economic Research, Newfoundland. 1987. p.xi.

of the New Age community. As a social group their explicit aim is to explore and to develop a belief system, a common 'modus vivendi', 'salvation for a dying planet', 'a new age', a new ideology. It is an empirical matter. Notions play a key and conscious role for the actors themselves.

Like a monastic, or any other spiritual community, 'ideology' plays a prominent role in this particular social scene.. All communities where people move together to form a common group will have a degree of ideological convergence. For example, as Hostetler and Huntington explain,² when discussing the Hutterites of North America, an essential goal with these people is to lose self-identity and to submit to the communal will and agreed value system. Among the Hutterites there is a rigid hierarchy to be accepted. Likewise with another religious movement, with the maxim 'Let every breath be a continual prayer to God', the Shaker brethren try to organize themselves in accordance with sacred ideas and lead their lives in such a way that they can 'best serve God'. But in Glastonbury, not only does ideology play such a consciously prominent role in the alternative community, but it is not predetermined or inherited, nor is it given out by one individual such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh or Reverend Sun Myung Moon; rather it is in the process of constant formation through discussions, publications, and the popular notion of 'networking' or the 'sharing' of ideas, by all those who wish to be involved. Hence the social life of the New Age community becomes even more couched in discussions of particular ideas and values.

Much of the material presented in the ethnography exists as a philosophy in creation, a constant source of discussion in Glastonbury.

² 'The Hutterites in North America', J.A. Hostetler and G.E. Huntington. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1980

Walking up and down the streets, sitting in a cafe, being served in a shop, one can be almost certain of turning to see noddings of the head, bursts of enthusiastic agreement, and to hear the murmur of ideas. Discussion, particularly about living, spirituality and self-analysis, is given high social status within the community. In places where I worked it was considered acceptable to postpone a task if an issue arose and an 'insight' could be gained. Thus, work in 'mainstream' society is often criticized on the basis that it does not grant people the 'space' to do this. However, it is also often a matter of criticism, both by those who are involved in the alternative community and, more particularly, by those who stand at its periphery, that people in Glastonbury just talk and never act. The 'fantasies' are brought to Glastonbury, and sometimes are never followed by actions. One informant, who worked as a healer in the area, commented,

"Although Glastonbury is a healing place, I don't know if it's a place to stay if you want to get things together, perhaps the energy of the place works against that. Maybe it's a place for healing in and then moving on. Is it possible to be together here? Look at the number of organizations that get into debt here."

As I have said, 'individualism' and 'holism' are terms used within the alternative community in Glastonbury, and the New Age movement internationally. They are also analytical and academic notions. The 'New Age' and the academic referents to the terms are different and yet they are not readily separable into the tidy categories of 'etic' and 'emic'; the actors' models and interpretations of the words overlap with those of the analyst. The actors are predominantly from middle-class Western society with an above average level of education, and thus their conception of these terms is linked to both levels. To a lesser extent this applies also to

an anthropologist, such as myself, who is 'enculturated' in both fields. However, although the understanding of the terms 'individualism' and 'holism' may not be totally separable, the terms are used to communicate in a different context by people in Glastonbury, and by people in a university.

In recent anthropological writings, particularly those of Louis Dumont, the concepts of 'individualism' and 'holism' are often presented in opposition to each other. They are seen to represent two different types of social order which cannot co-exist in one society. Here we are presented with a problem. In Glastonbury both elements appear to be present; is the New Age in Glastonbury the nominal exception to the analytical rule propounded by Dumont, and his evolutionary forebears such as Mauss, that 'individualism' and 'holism' cannot exist as complements? Or is it, as I shall suggest, that the analytical categories, set up as rigid dichotomies, become mis-applied? Using the 'New Age' in Glastonbury as an example, I shall argue that these two concepts can not only co-exist, but function as a mutually dependent complement. Firstly I intend to show how these concepts are applied in a New Age context.

Individualism

Amongst informants the term 'individual' is widely used to refer to the separate physical body. It is often expressed verbally in terms of an entity having different needs and different forms of expression. Thus it corresponds to the concept of person which, as Marcel Mauss explains, can be found in all human societies,

"Let me merely say that it is plain, particularly to us, that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of

his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical."³

However, where Mauss uses the term 'self' and I, 'individual', we both distinguish between these and 'individualism'. 'Individualism', in New Age terms, places emphasis upon 'self-development', as part of a necessary philosophical and spiritual quest within the individual. In 'New Age' terms the self is primary; as a movement it is fundamentally about a change of consciousness, a new world view, a 'spiritual awakening' which must take place in each person individually before the collectivity, or the structures, of society can be changed. Perhaps the most public face of the 'New Age' as a social movement or philosophy is of therapy oriented groups, of individuals trying to change and develop themselves and their approach to life. Such an approach is immediately apparent in my ethnography with examples such as re-birthing where the individual re-lives their initial birth experience by immersing themselves in water in order to 're-experience' the moment of birth in a positive rather than traumatic way. The central idea is that one's physical birth in the world was cold, tearful, unfriendly and alienating which set the groundwork for a negative attitude to life. To re-experience the moment of birth in a pleasurable semi-orgiastic way, people hope to challenge some of this negativity. Only once one has achieved such self-development, or 'raised one's consciousness' as it is often referred to, is it considered possible to change the world. Thus individualism is central to New Age ideas.

Moreover, individualism emerges in the form of acknowledging the needs, desires and separate 'paths' of the individual. Referring back once more to the ethnography we see this in the education of children where it

³ 'A Category of the Human Mind: the notion of the person; the notion of self'

is considered imperative that they be allowed 'free expression'. Likewise, with reference to the body, the health of a person is related to how openly they are able to express themselves, and their needs and desires fulfilled. If someone is 'emotionally repressed', it is believed that their emotions will manifest themselves through physical illness. The plethora of different philosophical and religious ideas from a multitude of differing sources, centuries, and cultures further bear witness to how individuality in the pursuit of following one's 'path' is encouraged.

Holism

Whilst the individualism of in New Age ideas might appear a concentrated form of the renowned Western 'cult of the individual', strong holistic elements are also present within the New Age movement, as I have illustrated in my ethnography. I have described these under the three main headings of 'Gaia', notions of common essence, and rituals of communality. The term 'holistic' is applied to a wide range of different categories in Glastonbury from 'holistic health' to 'Gaia', the planet. The term is used to convey the connection between different elements to make a whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

In all this the term 'holistic' is applied at a number of different levels. For example, it is used to refer to the 'mind, body and spirit' which are considered to make up the component parts of the individual and to be mutually influential. One healer uses this term in reference to massage,

"it is often through receiving a massage that people first begin their journey of self-discovery and exploration of the integral link of the body, mind and spirit - the holistic principle."⁴

⁴ 'A Language of Love', Nitya Lacroix. *Kindred Spirit*. Spring 1991.

From the holistic elements within the body we move one step further outwards to humanity itself. In the rituals of communality described in the ethnography we saw how the connections are made between individuals. In the ritual in the rose garden people were told to look into each others eyes and to see a common 'spark' that represented a common humanity. At a third level we see the term 'holism' is most often used alongside the 'Gaia theory', adapted from James Lovelock's essentially scientific theory to see the planet earth as a living organism with all parts mutually influential. This has influenced not only New Age attitudes to the earth as a whole, but also to 'community' in Glastonbury, with the idea that everyone has a role to play. Generally, as we saw in the Chapter Seven, notions of holism are most commonly linked to philosophical, theoretical and spiritual or ideological notions, in contrast to individualism which is more prominently articulated in terms of ways of living and working.

Individualism and holism mixed.

How did I get here?
 On the backs of a million, million lives
 From where did I come?
 Out of the prehistoric slime
 I oozed into amoebic life.
 Thence into fish with budding limb
 On, on, on through aeons and oceans
 Then up, up, up I was thrown
 Sliding, helpless, scorched and starved
 I died, died, died and died again

Until those feet emerged to crawl
 Through mating, birthing, suckling, dying,
 Evolving, changing, ceaselessly,
 Till I emerged a two-legged creature
 Erect and cunning, unknowing, free,
 Brighter and broader grew my reason
 Warmer and deeper felt my heart.⁵

In this poem we see the idea of the individual emerging from something universal. The writer describes an emergence from 'the prehistoric slime', and the action of forming a separate entity in the world. It is a poem about evolution of a species as well as the formation of the individual from the 'universal matter', the 'pre-historic slime'. In this complement of the individual and universal, we see the complement of the holistic and the individual in New Age thought. Human beings at large are seen to be both separate entities and also part of the universe. As the opening lines to the poem read, "How did I get here? On the backs of a million, million lives". Similarly in meditation meetings, people combine their 'energy' to form 'light' in order to create a unified power and to spread their energy around the world. They thus combine to form something independent of themselves. Thus holism is the universal in New Age thought; in the 'Gaia' theory holism represents the whole earth. It is also the 'million lives' and the 'energy' which is produced from a group of people meditating together. Examine the following statement from a book called 'The New Age',

⁵ Poem by Phillippa Bowers, handout at sculpture exhibition in Glastonbury Experience, 1987.

"I see the New Age phenomena as the visible tip of the iceberg of a mass movement in which humanity is reasserting its rights to explore spirituality in total freedom. The constraints of religious and intellectual ideology are falling away."⁶

In this statement we see again the combination of holistic and individualistic elements; the writer stresses the individualistic with phrases such as 'total freedom' and suggests that people are no longer constrained by religious or intellectual ideology but are free to make their own choices. However, simultaneously phrases such as 'phenomena', 'mass movement' and humanity are introduced which suggest ideas of holism. Whilst the word 'individual' is referred to in relation to the self, and the term 'individualism' used rather less, the term 'holistic' is widespread. The 'New Age' is often referred to as the 'holistic vision'; 'holistic health' and 'holistic living' are also famous New Age terms.

Turning to academic usage, we find a myriad of different concepts, referents and commentaries which evoke the notions of 'individualism' and 'holism'. Firstly, individualism; as Max Weber, the social thinker often associated with a triangular relationship between individualism, capitalism and Protestantism, commented, "The term individualism embraces the utmost heterogeneity of meanings..."⁷ Likewise Steven Lukes, in his discussion of the term 'individualism'⁸, evokes a similar sense of heterogeneity by looking at the semantic history of the word, with its different cultural and historical roots. Thus in France, 'individualisme' is closely linked to the French Revolution. For

⁶ 'The New Age. An Anthology of Essential Writings', ed. William Bloom. Channel 4 Book. 1991. p.xv.

⁷ 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism', Max Weber. 1904-5. London, 1930. p.222.

⁸ 'Individualism', Steven Lukes. Basil Blackwell, 1973.

conservative thinkers 'individualisme' represented a kind of anarchy of the spirit, and a suggestion remains in the nuance of the word that it connotes putting one's own interests above those of society. Contrastingly, in Germany, *individualität* expresses a notion of individual uniqueness, originality and self-realization. However it was initially in America that individualism first came to be identified with liberal democracy, and, secondly, capitalism.

Just as different cultures have differing conceptions of the term 'individualism', so the term is also identified in a variety of ways with different methods of historical, political, philosophical and social scientific analysis. Steven Lukes thus refers to 'methodological individualism', which he defines as

"a doctrine about explanation which asserts that all attempts to explain social (or individual) phenomena are to be rejected (or, according to a current more sophisticated version, rejected as rock-bottom explanations) unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals."⁹

Many theses and syntheses have evolved in reaction to such a doctrine. These theses and syntheses are essentially holistic. They insist that explanations of social phenomena lie in the existence of a larger unified system. In analytical thinking, then, there is evidently a split: individualism or holism is an either/or matter. This can also be seen in the history of political thought,

"individualism regards humanity as made up of disconnected or warring atoms: socialism regards it as an organic whole, a vital

⁹ *ibid* 8, p. 110.

unity formed by the combination of contributing members mutually interdependent."¹⁰

Just as in political thought socialism and individualism are posited at opposite ends of the spectrum, so traditionally have holism and individualism been presented as a dichotomy in social scientific thought. 'Holism' represents the larger system, the 'culture' which subsumes the individual. Such a tradition, historically prevalent in the works of Mauss, as well as in Durkheim's notions of solidarity, continues in contemporary discussions with writers such as Louis Dumont.

Dumont's voice is heard in the foreground of current academic debate about individualism. Combining social anthropology with the 'history of ideas', his essays cover a wide range of topics and draw upon many different sources. I would like to briefly describe Dumont's position in order to lay the groundwork for a re-examination of some of his basic concepts in the section to follow. In the glossary he gives a definition of the terms 'individualism' and 'holism',¹¹

holism - 'We call holist (holistic) an ideology that valorizes the social whole and neglects or subordinates the human individual; see the opposite: individualism. By extension, a sociology is holistic if it starts from the global society and not from the individual supposed to be given independently.'

individualism - "By opposition to holism, we call individualist an ideology which valorizes the individual."

¹⁰ Bishop of Durham. Brooke Foss. 1890. *ibid* 5.p.33

¹¹ 'Essays on Individualism. Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective'. Louis Dumont. University of Chicago Press. 1986. Glossary.

He clarifies his use of the term individual by distinguishing between the empirical subject, as a sample of the human species, and "An independent, autonomous moral and, thus, essentially nonsocial being..". He writes that his concern is with the study of the latter. Thus when he is talking about the 'individual', he is concerned, to give a New Age example, with the concern for self-development and self-expression, rather than with 'a New Ager' as a example of a member of the community.

With reference to theory Dumont identifies the two analytical categories of methodological individualism and methodological holism. In the first category he sees the method of analyzing society as "arising from the interaction of individuals", and in the second, society "as a global fact irreducible to its parts".¹² Like his teacher, Mauss, Dumont contends that it is only possible to examine a culture from a position of holism, since as soon as one approaches a culture structures such as language are implicated which are inherently holistic.

Beyond conceptual categories, Dumont sees individualism and holism as fundamentally incompatible. Thus when they do exist in a given culture as social forces it can only be on different levels with a relationship of hierarchy between them. He refers to them as 'two antithetical universes', 'two mutually irreconcilable ideologies'. For example, he refers to social thinking in Germany in the 1770's where holistic notions of 'volk' exist within the culture and yet individualism prevails between cultures.¹³ Accordingly he grasps the presence of individualism and holism in human society in terms of an evolutionary framework. Individualism, as a social principle, Dumont sees developing

¹² "Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective", Louis Dumont, University of Chicago Press, 1986.p.2-3.

¹³ *ibid* 12.p.144

only after a certain evolutionary watershed has passed; for him individualism emerges alongside the introduction of, and widespread adherence to, the Christian religion. Tribal society is accordingly the epitome of holism. According to Dumont, it appears once on the evolutionary trail there is no turning back; moreover as individualism evolves holism correspondingly declines. Any attempt to return to holism in modern society is impossible, and he takes Nazism as an example, describing the alleged notions holism in evoked in Germany in the 1930's as a 'masquerade'.¹³

The problem which Dumont asks in such an evolutionary scenario is how a society can move from one type to another that is a seeming contradiction of the first.¹⁴ Here he isolates two types of individualism; 'outworldly individualism' and 'inworldly individualism'. The example of India is given to describe the latter. In 'holistic' India, society imposes a tight interdependence, but there also exists an institution of world renunciation. He calls this out-worldly individualism, as the person who is after ultimate truth forgoes social life and its constraints to devote himself to his own progress and destiny; he lives outside the social world. In contrast Dumont looks at individualistic 'Western society' and uses the influence of Christianity to explain how we have developed a form of individualism which very much exists inside the world,

"Sociologically speaking, the emancipation of the individual through a personal transcendence, and the union of outworldly individuals

¹³ p16. *ibid* 12

¹⁴ "A Modified View of our Origins: the Christian beginnings of modern individualism", Louis Dumont, from "The Category of the Person. Anthropology, philosophy, history", ed. Carrithers, Collins and Lukes, 1985.

in a community that treads on earth but has its heart in heaven,
may constitute a passable formula for Christianity."¹⁵

In contrast to Christianity, in Indian religion individualism prevails on a spiritual plane.

Dumont's construction of the history of the notions of individualism and holism around the development of Christianity and modernization processes, provides a wide explanatory structure; whole developments in, and periods of, history can be neatly slotted in and explained accordingly. However, I argue that such notions are oversimplified and, furthermore, through an ethnographic example, are shown to be false.

Dumont writes that individualism and holism cannot co-exist at the same level in any society. However in the example of Glastonbury we see this is not so. A high value is placed upon individualism, and strong notions of holism are also evoked. Earlier in this chapter I posed the question whether perhaps Glastonbury is the nominal exception to the incompatible forces of individualism and holism; or, as I now propose, has Dumont's analytical distinction between individualism and holism, set up a rigid and false dichotomy which does not pertain in the light of ethnographic data?

The point surely is that these terms are mutually interdependent; the idea of individualism implies the idea of holism, and vice versa. Semantically the word 'individualism' can only exist in relation to something else. The dictionary definition places it as 'single; particular, special, opposite to general', i.e. the single member of a society, the whole. Thus individual, or individualism, is a linguistic term with a holistic referent. Let me clarify this. In case 'A', X has decided to leave her friends and family and everyone X knows in order to live in the desert in

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.99

a one room shack with a hundred miles of empty land around her. X now has contact with no other living human beings. We can look at X as a Robinson Crusoe figure. In case 'B', Y is taken immediately after birth and lowered into the desert by a rope from an overflying plane and left there to live alone. Miraculously Y survives, and grows up to reach adulthood with no contact with any other human. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with Tarzan. In the case of X, the action of going to live in a desert is individualistic since X has disengaged herself from culture by deciding to live alone. In case B, with Y growing up totally outside of society, it is neither appropriate nor relevant to refer to Y's actions as individualistic. For Y, the necessary context for individualism, some notion of holism, or in comparison to a wider group, is lacking.

If individualism and holism are mutually implicating and exist only in relation to the other, it follows that they must necessarily be present in all social groups. Individualism and holism can always be found in tension with each other. Louis Dumont suggests that individualism and holism are logically incompatible. I argue that they are logically inseparable.

Let us return to the case study of the spiritual community described in Chapter Seven. Here we clearly see the notions of individualism and holism at work simultaneously; people who chose individuality in their spiritual life were also looking for, and trying to develop, the holism of a spiritual community. In this particular study we see a lot of conflict as people find themselves with differing and incompatible ideas of the way such a spiritual community could, and would, evolve. As the differences between expectations became manifest, people began to wonder whether they wanted to form a group at all, and eventually the meeting dissolved. In this example, the co-existence of individualism and holism at the level of ideas is evident, with the holism

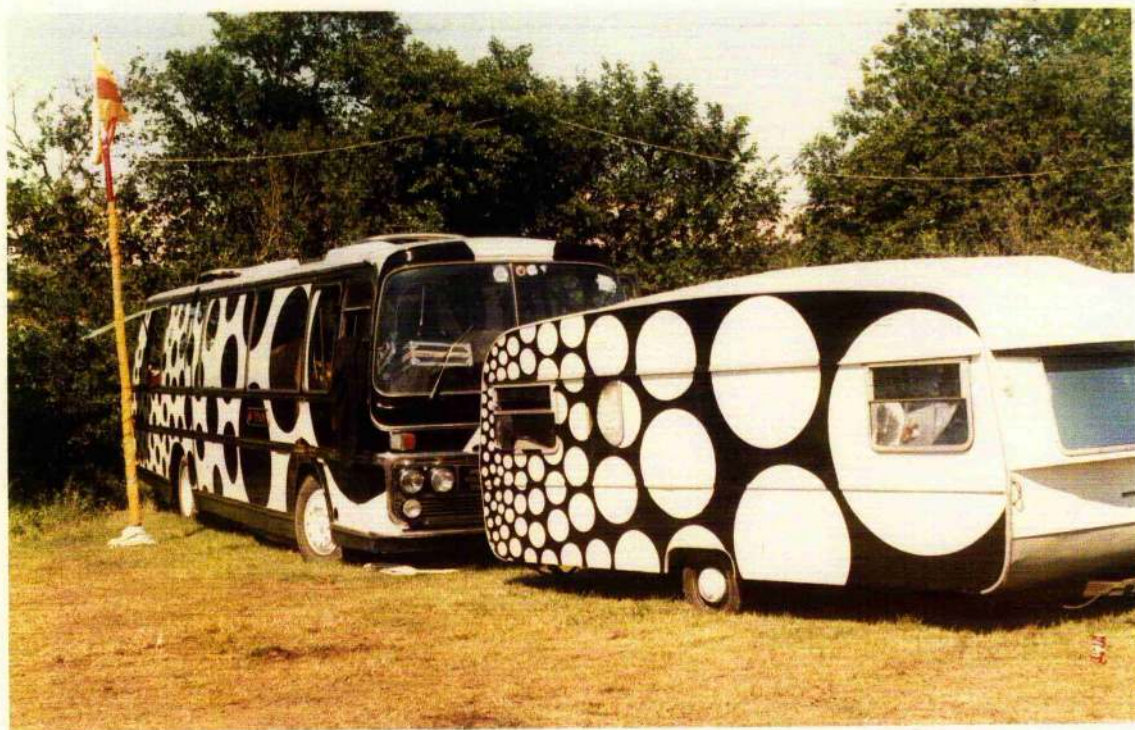
of the group contrasting with the individualism of the separate spiritual paths. People's interaction centred around the tension between the two. As complementary ideologies they imply in the realm of actions conflict and contradictions. Contradictions are embedded in social life on all levels. For example, if one takes a discourse analysis of any short speech act, contradictions will be found. Society is not a closed system of consistent laws but fluid and changing. Not only do people live with apparent contradictory notions in their lives, they also manipulate them. To theorize society only in terms of consistencies has been called to task by post-modernist writers. As Frazer and Lyotard argue,

"the social bond is a weave of criss-crossing threads of discursive practices, no single one of which runs continuously throughout the whole...It follows that social identities are complex and heterogeneous. They cannot be mapped onto one another nor onto the social totality."¹⁵

In this chapter I have discussed some of the notions surrounding the terms individualism and holism, by placing them in the context of some ethnographic material. In the writings of Louis Dumont and his forebears, such as Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim, we see a strong emphasis upon an evolutionary movement from one side of a posed dichotomy between individualism and holism, to another. In contrast, I argue that such an approach implies a totally coherent model of society which is rarely empirically evident. Furthermore, to posit individualism and holism at either end of a continuum is to enforce a dichotomous and

¹⁵ 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism', Nancy Frazer and Linda Nicholson. From 'Theory, Culture and Society. Explorations in Critical Social Science'. vol.5.no.2-3. June 1988.p.378.

opposed relationship. These terms, I contend, are mutually interdependent. They imply both complementarity and contradiction.



Afterword

'Utopianism represents a tradition of thought about the perfect society and the reoccurring dream of stability in which perfection is defined as harmony.'¹

Utopia: a new vision, a new world, harmonious co-existence, a new age. Utopian visions evoke the sense of a possible, future and idealistic society. Since mankind was banished from the Garden of Eden, we in the Christian tradition have been trying to re-create paradise. The utopian element in the New Age movement in the 1980's hardly constitutes the first such vision.

Utopian vision is not restricted to religious movements or to literary fantasies of writers such as Sir Thomas More. Utopia, the invocation of 'the perfect society', can be found in the political constitution of many societies. Moreover, notions of utopia are expressed in political rhetoric as 'the reoccurring dream of stability'. Ironically George Bush, in a speech on the Gulf War, refers to such a vision as 'the new age',

"And so let it be said of the final decade of the 20th century, this was a time when humankind came into its own, when we emerged from the grit and the smoke of the industrial age to bring about a revolution of the spirit and the mind and began a journey into a new day, a new age and a new partnership of nations."²

George Bush, a New Ager? There's food for thought.

¹ 'Communitarian Societies' - John Hostetler, Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1974, page 2

² 'Aggression in the Gulf. A Partnership of Nations.' George Bush, October 1st 1990. From 'Vital Speeches of the Day', Mount Pleasant, S.C.29465

In the last two hundred years, a large number of utopian societies have evolved. Many of these have been in North America; ideas of utopia are perhaps a logical extension to the mass emigration to the 'new world'. As people saw themselves starting a new life in a new continent, so they also looked for new ways to lead it. Of course other, already existing utopian, groups such as John Winthrop's Puritans³, or the Hutterites, moved to North America from Europe to escape religious persecution in their own countries. Rosabeth Moss Kanter⁴ identifies three major stages in the burgeoning of utopian communities or movements in North America, and draws upon three corresponding themes. The first phase she dates before 1845 where that the majority of such communities were dominated by a religious theme. For example, there were the 'Children of Peace' in nineteenth century Ontario⁵ led by David Wilson. They constituted a breakaway from the Quakers and were motivated by a desire to form a model community which would serve as an example to change the world. The second wave of utopia building Kanter dates to the onset of the Industrial Revolution. She links this second wave with the social upheaval, overcrowding and poverty that went hand in hand with industrialism. In this period we see groups like the Shakers emerge, so named because of their ecstatic and trance like states of worship. Likewise there was the Oneida group in the north east of America; living as a community and led by John Noyes⁶ they saw themselves as one large family, sharing both material and spiritual life. Children were brought up communally and a system of 'complex marriage' was introduced whereby

³ 'Cities on a Hill. A Journey through Contemporary American Cultures', Frances Fitzgerald. Picador 1986.

⁴ 'Commitment and Community- Communes and Utopias in Sociological perspective'. Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Harvard University Press. 1972.

⁵ 'From Egalitarianism to Inequality: The Children of Peace In Nineteenth Century Ontario'. Matthew Cooper. Ethnology. 1986.

⁶ *ibid* 4

every member had access to every other member sexually with his or her consent. Special relationships were discouraged as these were seen to detract from a commitment to the community, and to God. One of the interesting aspects of both the Shakers and the Oneida community was that they developed a strong economic basis of support; the Shakers were excellent furniture makers and the Oneida community made steel traps that became the standard brand throughout the Union.



A third group of communities are identified as having a psycho-social base and are most commonly identified with the wave of utopian community building that accompanied the social change in the 1960's. For example the 'Children of God', founded by David Berg who set up a coffee house in California in 1967 to serve 'hippies'. Berg and his family themselves grew long hair and provided free food and music. Berg prophesized the Second Coming, before which the world situation was to deteriorate through pollution, economic disasters and inflation⁷. Another example is the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh community in Poona, India, and later Oregon, North America⁸. This provides an instance of a 'sect' or communitarian utopian movement characterized by the growing fascination, clearly evident in the 1960's, with 'gurus' from the East. Such a fascination continues to the present day with the followers of the Indian meditation teacher, Guru Maharaj Ji, and indeed the New Age movement itself. The popularity of Eastern or foreign guru figures can be traced, I believe, to a growing questioning of Christianity in the West. As communication between distant parts of the world increases, people look to other cultures for spiritual inspiration. Secondly, non-industrialized nations such as India are seen as having something we Westerners have lost in the process of industrialization, a 'closeness' to nature and a 'natural' spirituality. These themes are, of course, central to New Age ideas.

⁷ 'Salvation and Protest-Studies of Social and Religious Movements', Roy Wallis. Francis Pinter, 1979.

⁸ *ibid* 3

So what, if anything, do all these movements have in common? They range over centuries, and from celibate groups like the Shakers to such 'refugee' movements from Europe as the Amish, to the People's Temple in Guyana with its left-wing fundamentalist political rhetoric propounded by Jim Jones.⁹ These groups have had different fates: some, like the Oneida community, died a 'natural death' as numbers fell; the Shakers survive only as museum pieces largely in the form of their furniture which is sold to media stars such as Oprah Winfrey for thousands of dollars; others such as the Hare Krishnas have become a familiar and colourful site in most major Western capitals; while the People's Temple in Guyana ended in a mass suicide which claimed the lives of over nine hundred people. The New Age movement, meanwhile, is still in its infancy.

Many academics and journalists who have examined the wide range of utopian movements have concluded that they arise during periods of great social change; even the utopian ideals of Sir Thomas More can be traced to the upheaval in the church during the reign of Henry VIIIth. Many other movements, such as the Christain Scientists, flourished during the Industrial Revolution of the Western World which radically changed social relations with a concentration of the population in the urban centres, and its anchoring to the workplace.

This leads, inevitably, to the question, why now? What is the social change that has inspired a significant minority of people to become involved in the New Age movement during the late 1980's? Roy Wallis' comment on the movements of the sixties and seventies can equally well be applied to the present day,

⁹ 'Black and White', Shiva Naipaul. 1980. Sphere Books. London.

"...at the same time as the emergence of a market for recipes for worldly success, there has emerged a need for methods of escaping the constraints and inhibitions usually required in order to achieve that success. Methods are sought for overcoming the effects of a lengthy socialization into the Protestant Ethic, in order to explore the private self, to buttress a deinstitutionalized identity, and to indulge hedonistic impulses in an affluent advanced industrial society in which consumption has become as much an imperative as production."¹⁰

Likewise, Alvin Toffler¹¹ writes of an age of 'post-industrialism' or the 'age of technology' where the huge workforce and man-hours required by industrialism have been largely replaced by technology, and where the need for a nuclear family in which the domestic unit catered for the 'man at the factory' no longer prevails. As Miriam David¹² points out, the 'New Right' governments of Britain and America of the 1980's have not catered for such change. For example, while there are more and more single-parent and dual income families, motherhood continues, in New Right political policy, to be seen as an all-consuming, unpaid activity. In reaction to this, people have looked for ways in Wallis' words, to 'explore the private self, to buttress a deinstitutionalized identity'. Hence the proliferation of Christian fundamentalist movements such as the Jesus Army, or those^f led by charismatic leaders such as Jerry Falwell or Billy Graham. Hence, for those searching outside the Christian church, the New Age movement.

¹⁰ 'The Rebirth of the Gods? Reflections on the New Religions in the West', Roy Wallis. Queens University Papers. 1978. p.18-19.

¹¹ 'The Third Wave'. Alvin Toffler. William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd. 1980

¹² 'Moral and Maternal. The Family in the Right', Miriam David. From 'The Ideology of the New Right', ed. Ruth Levitas. Polity Press, 1986.

Glastonbury is not the only centre for the New Age movement in Britain. Travelling further into the south west is Totnes, a town which has attracted a large number of people wishing to develop an alternative lifestyle based on New Age beliefs. In most British cities, moreover, it has become usual to find a shop selling New Age books. A large rural group, living in tipis, has settled in Wales, and Findhorn, a college and community near Forres in the Highlands of Scotland, remains a big centre. To my knowledge this is the only anthropological study of the New Age. Under the broader framework of 'alternative living' can be found a number of parallel studies, such as Ullrich Koekel's research on the economy of 'alternative' immigrants in Ireland,¹³ and Nicholas Ford's doctoral thesis examining similar themes in rural Dyfed.¹⁴ Under the broad definition of 'alternative belief systems' can also be included Tanya Luhrmann's study of witchcraft in London.¹⁵

In this thesis I have tried to describe and to examine in some depth my experiences of living with, and amongst, people trying to create the utopian vision of the New Age movement. Central to the movement is the fact that it casts itself in opposition to mainstream British society; it is the 'alternative community'. By describing an 'alternative community' in one locality, I have correspondingly attempted to cover some issues concerning its relationship with wider British society. By highlighting certain aspects of their culture (as they appeared highlighted to me during the period of my fieldwork) I have identified two complementary principles: individualism and holism. It is upon this complement that the

¹³ 'Immigrants- Entrepreneurs of the Future?' Ullrich Koekel. From 'Common Ground The Magazine of Alternative Living'. June-July 1989. p.6-8.

¹⁴ 'Consciousness and Lifestyle: Alternative Developments in the Culture and Economy of Rural Dyfed', by Nicholas Ford. University of Wales Ph.d. thesis. Aberystwyth. 1983.

¹⁵ 'Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present-day England', Tanya Luhrmann. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. 1989.

balance in their ideas and lifestyle rests. In this thesis I hope to have made a contribution to the current body of anthropological literature upon utopian groups. By and large we in Western culture see our society as a violent and aggressive one. We construct this as a problem. Thus, perhaps most importantly, I have presented what my informants sincerely hoped to be a peaceful society.



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